

CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING IN A MULTISITE CONTEXT:
MAXIMIZING CONTEXTUALIZATION WHILE
MAINTAINING UNITY AS ONE CHURCH

A THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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MAY 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rachel, you have been a constant source of encouragement and strength through my studies, in ministry and in our journey together. Kezia, Elliana and Shiloh you make challenging days beautiful. Woodside Bible Church campus pastors, thank you for the ongoing support and conversations about contextualizing throughout the campuses. Jeff Wallace, you have become a good friend and a tremendous blessing of God. Dr. Scott Gibson, Dr. Matthew Kim and Dr. Nick Gatzke your discipleship throughout these past three years will have lasting effect on me and through my ministry. Finally, Christ Jesus my Lord and Savior your grace and mercy are overwhelming, it is in great humility that I offer these thoughts. Lord, may you use this work in some small way to bring glory to You.

ABSTRACT

Deepening our appreciation for contextualized sermons found in the messages of Jesus, Paul and other Bible preachers is important for every preacher. By examining Scriptures, studying the literature on the subject and conducting interviews with experienced preaching campus pastors, the author identifies the inevitability and unintentionality of preachers to ineffectively contextualize sermons. With greater attention and strategy, preachers can contextualize their sermons to congregations with distinct cultural narratives. Preaching in multisite churches often is more restrictive in cultural adaptation because of the overarching goal to be one church. This goal of unity has potential to edge out contextualization. A practical approach is presented for preachers to understand their cultural context and tailor their preaching to their particular community; as well, a rubric is offered to multisite pastors to contextualize preaching while strengthening being one church in vision, mission and values.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Identification of the Problem

Preachers and churches desire to have impact in their cultures, so that they will have influence over their cultures. Few churches seem to influence the broader community. The reasons are numerous, yet one common cause – as this thesis will demonstrate – is that they do not go far enough to culturally contextualize the preaching of God’s Word. Contextualized preaching, in the author’s review of the literature, is when the preacher adapts the sermon to the uniqueness of a particular culture without compromising Scripture. This could be due to preachers not fully appreciating why sermons must be contextualized to have greater cultural effect or preachers may have not studied how Jesus, Paul and others demonstrated contextualizing sermons to specific communities. Further, churches, especially multisite churches, have internal factors which set parameters for the degree of contextualization.¹

The Bible and cultural intelligence answer the question “why should preachers contextualize sermons?” Our communities are constantly changing with people moving into the country and others moving around the country. New residents constantly are bringing fresh influences affecting the local culture. It is the residents of a community that develop its specific cultural narrative. These narratives are stories that people tell about themselves to make sense of their shared experiences. Cultural narratives include the pragmatic-productive narrative valuing the acquisition of possessions and power, the individualistic narrative encourages people to prioritize personal freedom above all, the honor-shame narrative stresses respect, reputation, duty

¹ The author has interacted with numerous multisite churches primarily through Leadership Network over the previous five years where he has formed this conclusion.

and honor, and the discursive narrative which places highest value on art, philosophy and learning.² This short list of possible cultural narratives reveals the differences between cultures. Within these cultural narratives, people think and make decisions differently, and they feel and emote differently.³

When there is little attempt to adapt preaching to a specific culture, the culturally-generic vocabulary, language and forms of communication will limit a community's understanding of the message. While God's truth may be accurately presented, without regard for the background and experience of hearer's thoughts, feelings and decision making, the message will have less bearing.⁴ Understanding one's culture and appropriately adapting to it will make a message clearer and more effective. Sermons can be adapted to be made attractive and relevant, and a message can also be adapted to challenge and confront. Since cultural narratives are distinct, messages can be far more effective when tailored to a community.

Contextualized sermons adapt the vocabulary, language and form of communication of God's Scriptures to a particular community.⁵ While the gospel is universal for everyone in all cultures, as soon as a preacher communicates the gospel, it is unavoidable to share it in a way that is more relevant to some cultures and less for other cultures. Jesus did not simply say not to preach the gospel to people who are hostile to it, rather he contextualized his message. When Jesus said to not throw pearls to pigs, he connected far more to the world of farmers raising pigs.⁶

² Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 90.

³ Keller, *Center Church*, 90.

⁴ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 13.

⁵ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 19.

⁶ Matthew 7:6 (English Standard Version [ESV]). All Scripture is quoted from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

With this illustration, Jesus' gospel presentation was contextualized more for some hearers but less for others. In fact, contextualization is inevitable. Every preacher either intentionally or unintentionally contextualizes. Tim Keller points out that, "If there is no single, context-free way to express the gospel, then contextualization is inevitable. As soon as you choose a language to speak in and particular words to use with that language, the culture-laden nature of words comes into play."⁷ Every preacher chooses language, words, stories, explanations and applications in preaching sermons. Anytime a preacher says more than the words written in the Bible he/she contextualizes.

Jesus demonstrated that an intentionally contextualized sermon can have greater cultural effect on its hearers.⁸ However, an unintentionally contextualized message will have far less effectiveness when it does not teach to the main objections and questions people have in that culture.⁹ Contextualization calls for sermons to be adapted to specific objections of the people represented in a culture. Contextualization includes but is not limited to adapting language, vocabulary, illustrations and applications, and it also goes far beyond those factors to adapting a message to the way people reason. Tim Keller shares how contextualization "is giving people the Bible answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them."¹⁰

⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 94.

⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

¹⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 89

Contextualization is not without concerns. While under contextualizing makes a message less relevant, over contextualizing prioritizes culture above the truthfulness of God's Word.¹¹ This happens when God's message is modified to avoid confronting culture, so that the preacher, the church and the message will be more palatable to the culture. When God's truth is edited, over contextualization is condemnable.

Ed Stetzer notes,

At the other end of the contextualization spectrum is too much adaptation. A message is presented in terms that are easily understood by the audience, but truth is compromised. We see this in places where Christian customs have been added to pagan belief systems, resulting in a confused syncretic of doctrine, and in churches that try to incorporate modern philosophy into their theology, whether or not it's biblical. The result is watering down of the truth.¹²

The problem arises when the values of a culture are given authority over Scripture. In an attempt to make Christianity palatable, some preachers have mistakenly redefined doctrine in cultural terms.¹³ Over contextualization is when the Scriptures are adapted to a culture and the culture has superiority over God's Word. Natee Tanchanpongs correctly identifies that contextualization involves keeping the essentials while flexing on the non-essentials.¹⁴ These concerns are legitimate and of highest importance. Every word the preacher speaks, each illustration and application constantly run the risk of either over or under contextualization. It is important to disciple preachers to remain biblically accurate while culturally relevant.

¹¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 34

¹² Ed Stetzer, "What Is Contextualization? Presenting The Gospel In Culturally Relevant Ways," The Exchange (blog), *Christianity Today*, October 12, 2014, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/what-is-contextualization.html>.

¹³ Craig Blomberg, "We Contextualize More Than We Realize," in *Local Theology for the Local Church*, ed. Matthew Cook (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010), 37.

¹⁴ Natee Tanchanpongs, "Developing a Palate for Authentic Theology," in *Local Theology for the Global Church*, ed. Matthew Cook (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010), 110.

The concerns of over contextualization do not challenge the biblical importance of adapting to a community, rather the concerns help identify the need to learn how to do this biblically, intentionally and strategically. When contextualization is done faithfully and skillfully, “we show people how the baseline ‘cultural narratives’ of their society and the hopes of their hearts can only find resolution and fulfillment in Jesus.”¹⁵ Sound contextualization does not compromise the essence and particulars of the Scriptures, it merely translates and adapts the communication of the essential message. Keller notes, “The great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring that scandal and offense of biblical truth.”¹⁶ The risk of over contextualization should not detour us from cultural relevance. Rather, failure to recognize and imitate the numerous biblical examples of cultural adaptation should put us on warning that our sermons will be irrelevant and ineffective.

While there are legitimate concerns with over contextualization, there are also severe limitations when the message is under contextualized. Adapting merely to a few cultural particulars such as music and clothing, most likely, will be insufficient. Contextualization requires the text (Bible) and the context (culture) both have weight and importance in determining how God’s truth is communicated. Culture is far more than music and clothing, it includes language, art, food, and folk customs. Culture includes core beliefs and values, as well as assumptions about reality. Culture also includes the human institutions of jurisprudence, education, family life and governance. Contextualizing the Scriptures should intentionally and strategically move in the direction toward accounting for the confluence of all these aspects of

¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 90.

¹⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 90

culture.¹⁷ Cultural adaptation cannot merely focus on behavior, but rather it is focused on the worldview of a culture. Each culture distinctly influences how decisions are made, how emotions are expressed, how power is used and how people relate in groups. Unless a preacher truly appreciates the distinctiveness of a cultural narrative, then any attempt to adapt a message will meet severe limitations due to under contextualization.

One common struggle with preachers learning about a new culture and adapting to it is that they have already been contextualized themselves. A preacher's personal contextualization is steeped in their experiences and the cultural influences that have molded them prior to entering their current community. The contexts that preachers have been raised in, lived in and worked in have all gradually shaped their predispositions. Preachers have learned to contextualize (whether they realize it or not) from the cultural influences they have experienced, and they often unaware impose these cultural influences of vocabulary, language and communication methods on the new culture they are preaching in. Since contextualization is inevitable, preachers unintentionally rely on the predispositions and assumptions of the cultures that have shaped them.¹⁸ In effect, preachers have unintentionally contextualized their preaching to themselves, and their messages are invitations to the community to adapt to the preacher rather than the preacher adapting to the community.

Self-awareness is critical for a preacher to contextualize effectively. The preacher must be able to recognize what vocabulary, language and communication methods he/she is bringing to a new context. A self-aware preacher can recognize the strengths and limitations of his/her acquired cultural predispositions. Armed with this awareness, the preacher may release some of the old and acquire the new cultural intelligence that is required for the immediate context.

¹⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 120.

¹⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 94.

Beyond the challenges of understanding oneself and the cultural narrative of the community, there are additional obstacles for every church especially multisite churches. Churches develop convictions related to their vision, mission, strategy, values, constitution, and philosophy of ministries. While most of these convictions are drawn from the Bible and shared by most churches, churches distinguish themselves from other churches by “how” they put these convictions into practice. For our purposes in this thesis, let’s refer to a church’s uniqueness as its “DNA”. A church’s DNA establishes boundaries for contextualization. Preachers representing a church may not contextualize beyond the scope of their DNA. In effect, the DNA establishes a lane within which a preacher must remain consistent. The question each church must ask itself is whether the lane formed by their church’s DNA provides sufficient freedom for the preacher to contextualize sermons particularly to the cultural narrative reflected in its congregation. While the narrative may be singular for one campus churches, there are multiple cultural narratives for multisite churches who have a number of distinct congregations.

Multisite churches may discover greater challenges to contextualize than one campus churches. Multiple campus churches often have a well-defined vision, mission, strategy and philosophy of ministry. The more their DNA is defined, the clearer the lane to contextualize. The contextualization challenge is discovered in the tension to be one church by honoring the DNA developed for the first campus but now expressed in many different cultures. Multisite churches desire to be one church regardless of the number of campuses.¹⁹ The geographic location of these campuses may have been determined by an intentional strategy while other multisite churches have developed campus locations through unanticipated opportunities. Either way, once a church has congregations in different communities, it is likely they will have people with differing

¹⁹ Ed Stetzer, "Multisite Churches Are Here And Here To Stay," *The Exchange* (blog), *Christianity Today*, February 24, 2014, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/multisite-churches-are-here-to-stay.html>.

cultural narratives. Often, the cultural adaptation took place primarily at the initial campus. The vision, mission, strategy and values were developed some time ago most significantly influenced by the founding pastor and the congregation. As additional campuses have been added, the DNA of the founding campus has been placed on additional communities.

The DNA for a multisite church sets the boundaries that all campuses are required to stay within. This DNA alignment among the campuses is emphasized to achieve the overarching goal to be one church.²⁰ These multisite lanes are almost always tighter and more restrictive than the Bible thereby limiting the freedom of preachers to contextualize messages. Of course, video based preaching multisite churches will be challenged in even greater ways because one sermon must effectively reach people across a spectrum of cultural narratives.

Preachers choose their place on the spectrum of contextualization. At one end of the spectrum is a group who believes the Bible can be read and communicated in a culture-free, universal way to any and every community. The other end of the spectrum is for those who hold to cultural relativism that Scripture must be adapted to every cultural setting.

Richard Lints describes the middle ground:

Evangelicals seek to work in the middle of this spectrum, insisting that while there are no universal, culture-free expressions of biblical teachings, the Bible nonetheless expresses absolute and universal truths. I would call this approach ‘balanced contextualization’ because it avoids these two extremes as it rests, ultimately and firmly, on the fulcrum of scriptural authority.²¹

A preacher’s decision on where they wish to land is not entirely left up to themselves, rather they must also consider the freedom they are permitted within the boundaries established by their church’s DNA.

²⁰ Warren Bird, "DNA Infusion: Making Multisite Mergers Work For Detroit Church," *Leadership Network Advance* (October 9, 2012): 1.

²¹ Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 101-103.

With a heightened degree of desire and intentionality, churches with one or more campuses could maximize their freedom to contextualize while staying within the lane of their church's DNA. Without greater attention, the freedoms afforded will continue to be overlooked, and congregations will continue to be required to contextualize themselves to the preacher.

Importance of the Study

Every preacher and every church is faced with the contextualization question. Where does the preacher and the church desire to land on the spectrum of adapting the message to specific communities? While there are written resources that examine the need for contextualization and resources detailing the different ways Jesus, Paul and others contextualized, very little, if any, resources are available that develop a rubric for how a preacher can discover the cultural narrative for contextualizing his/her sermons. Further, there appears to be a lack of resources that explore the tension of contextualization to varying communities while desiring to be one church. With greater intentionality and strategy, preachers and churches could discover greater freedom to contextualize while strengthening the unity of their church.

This thesis will include the results of personal interviews with campus pastors who minister within a multisite church with campuses located in culturally distinct communities. While these campus pastors currently minister in a multisite context, many of them previously ministered in a single site church context. The interviews will reveal how the campuses are strengthened and weakened by the restricted freedoms they have in tailoring their messages. It will also address opportunities for campuses to expand their freedoms in adapting to their communities while strengthening the unity as one church.

Parameters

This thesis will limit itself to the multisite church context. Only campus pastors of a multisite church will be studied and interviewed. However, some of these campus pastors have previously served as the preaching pastor of an independent church. Their previous experience may serve as a baseline for their understanding of the greater freedom to exegete communities and tailor sermons specifically to a community in contrast to possibly more limited freedoms within a multisite church.

Concerning the research participants included in this work, the campus pastors fit the following criteria: All research participants are engaged in the work of full-time Christian ministry with the regular duty of preaching not less than forty times per year. They all work for Woodside Bible Church. They have been in the work of preaching ministry for at least one year, and they have been in their present cultural context for more than one year.

The goal of this work is not to advocate for a multisite church as stronger or weaker than independent churches. Rather, the goal of this thesis is to argue for greater contextualization within the multisite church while strengthening the unity of the multisite church.

Within the multisite church model, there are differences in the mode of preaching. A key difference is some multisite churches have one preacher shared by video to all campuses while other multisite churches have a different preacher for each campus. With live teaching, the campus pastor is the primary communicator of God's Word to the campus congregation. The participants who have been interviewed preach in a multisite church that offers live preaching at each campus.

Organization of Chapters

In *Chapter One: Introduction*, the problem has been identified, and the reason for the study has been clarified.

In *Chapter Two: Theological Foundations*, a biblical and theological foundation will be built. This will require an examination of the biblical basis for contextualized preaching. We will explore selected Biblical passages including Romans 1 and 2, 1 Corinthians 1 and 9 and various passages from the Book of Acts.

In *Chapter Three: Literature Review*, historical and current literature will be examined. In addition, chapter three will include a synopsis of the personal interviews with campus pastors in a variety of cultural contexts. Interview questions and transcripts are located in Appendix B. The literature as well as the interviews have assisted in building a rubric that will help multisite churches improve their cultural contextualization while simultaneously strengthening the unity as one church.

In *Chapter Four: Seminar on Contextualized Preaching in a Multisite Context*, the findings of the research projects are revealed. From the results of the survey, a comparison and contrast of various campus pastors' answers are examined from which conclusions are drawn about contextualizing preaching in a multisite context.

In *Chapter Five: Conclusions*, the chapter will serve as a conclusion evaluating and summarizing the discoveries and presenting a helpful rubric that could be beneficial for Woodside as well as other multisite churches.

Methodology

With Woodside Bible Church as the primary source for relevant information, a few research methodologies were utilized: First, the writer's personal involvement and discoveries in merging and planting these campuses. Second, in-depth interviews with the campus pastors to whom campus leadership has transitioned. Third, a survey of key leaders in these campuses related to cultural intelligence and preaching tailored to their particular community.

Setting

The author is working on this thesis in a particular ministry context. He serves as executive pastor of campuses at Woodside Bible Church in Troy, Michigan. The founding campus located in Troy with 83,000 residents²² represents one of fourteen campuses spread over the southeast region of Michigan. The additional twelve campuses represent communities with the combined population of 194,000 people. Of the total communities with campuses, 10,100 people on average attend the fourteen campuses.

Woodside is sixty-one years old.²³ The current senior pastor, Doug Schmidt, has led Woodside for twenty-five years. It began as a traditional church committed to conservative evangelical doctrine, yet transitioned to contemporary worship and philosophy of ministry while never wavering in its doctrine. As the church grew from hundreds to thousands, more acres were purchased and a new building was constructed. Prior to the first service, the senior pastor met with the elders and shared how even if 10,000 were to meet in this new building it would not be large enough for the vision that God had given the leadership. The vision was to establish and revitalize lighthouses of Christ throughout southeast Michigan. As leadership looked around the area, they saw churches down the street and in other communities that were similar in doctrine, but their parking lots nearly empty. There had to be a better way. The question that they wrestled with was, “how could God’s resources – people and buildings – be better optimized without having to invest \$250,000 to begin a new campus?” During the early 2000s, only a few churches had launched additional campuses, and it was rare to see healthy mergers of smaller churches into a larger church.

²² "City of Troy, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed November 12, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>.

²³ Big Beaver Baptist Church Articles of Association, "Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs," State of Michigan, n.d., accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/bcs_corp/results.asp?ID=723128&offset=20&page_name=corp.

Within months of worshiping in the new building, Redeemer Baptist church of Warren, Michigan merged into Woodside. Over the course of eleven years, nine churches would merge into Woodside and four campus plants would be established.²⁴ Seven of the mergers were with churches who knew they needed help. Their numbers of people and finances had been on a steady decline, and it was making ministry very difficult. One of the mergers was with a church that was growing. They were 300 people with numerous staff and a strong financial position.²⁵ Woodside is one church with fourteen campus locations.²⁶ Two of the campuses, both campus plants, are located in an urban setting within a primarily African American community. Another campus is located in the largest Arab Muslim community outside of the Middle East.²⁷ While several of the campuses are in rural settings,²⁸ another campus is located in a significantly millennial aged community.

Conclusion

With greater intentionality and discipleship on contextualized preaching, preachers and churches will experience more impact in their cultures. Communicators of God's Word naturally and inevitably contextualize based on their predispositions. In light of this, the question is not

²⁴ "Woodside Bible Church Home Page," Woodside Bible Church, n.d., accessed October 2, 2016, <https://woodsidebible.org/>.

²⁵ Matt December, "Woodside Bible Church Celebrates Grand Opening in Washington Township," *The Source* (Clinton Township), January 18, 2013.

²⁶ Woodside Staff, *History of Woodside Bible Church* (Troy, MI, n.d.). An internal historical document.

²⁷ Debanina Seaton, "Woodside Bible Church Welcomes New Pastor," *Press & Guide*, September 4, 2015.

²⁸ Jackie Smith, "Woodside Names New Pastor For Algonac," *The Times Herald*, January 9, 2017., accessed January 12, 2017

whether contextualization is appropriate. Rather, the focus is on how can preachers more strategically contextualize, so that they can more effectively relate God's Word to the specific cultural narrative while maintaining unity in a multisite church context.

In chapter two, the theological foundations will be explored by examining a number of Old and New Testament passages.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

God's Authors and Preachers Contextualize His Words

Flemming observes, “Although the term contextualization was quite recently minted, the activity of expressing and embodying the gospel in context-sensitive ways has characterized the Christian mission from the very beginning.”¹ The whole of the Scriptures bear witness to contextualizing God's Word to gatherings of people based on their language, religious beliefs and other cultural distinctives. God initially contextualized His message to a people who became known as Jews; yet, in time, God's message was re-contextualized to reach the Gentiles.

The Bible is a contextualized group of writings that help different groups of people understand who God is and what He is doing by adapting to the hearers' particular context. Scriptures were authored demonstrating the need and value of contextualization; that is, the Christian message to be meaningful must come in a group's language and cultural categories that make sense.² For example, the four Gospels adapt the story of Jesus for primary audiences with different ethnicities. Each book of the New Testament is an author's presentation of the Christian message targeted primarily to a specific audience. Possibly the most compelling evidence of contextualizing the Scriptures are Paul's speeches in the Book of Acts to distinct audiences. The Scriptures while constant and unchanging are also living and breathing relating to every culture.

¹ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 15.

² The author has come to this conclusion after five years of visiting fourteen Woodside campuses where he has reviewed the preaching in all of these locations.

Less and less disagreement surround the need and value of contextualization in circles of missiology, multi-cultural studies and in foreign missions.³ Contextualization has moved toward the theological mainstream, yet controversy clouds its applicability and practice. Communicators of God's Word must wrestle with contextualizing God's message to their cultural setting: "Every church in every particular place and time must learn to do theology in a way that makes sense to its audience while challenging it at the deepest level."⁴

A study of selected Scriptures reveals how contextualization of God's message was not only for the writing of Scriptures, but also for the preaching of Scriptures; biblical contextualization is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive for us today. Ed Stetzer reveals, "I suggest that we return to first-century thinking. What we find in the New Testament is that to be biblical requires contextualization."⁵ Dean Flemming developed this point in *Contextualization in the New Testament*. He argues, "Scripture itself can offer us a more adequate approach to the challenge of re-appropriating the gospel, because each book of the New Testament represents an attempt by the author to present the Christian message in a way that is targeted for a particular audience within a sociocultural environment."

The contextualization that is lacking among today's preachers is not always due to a disagreement theologically or even concern over compromising truth. Rather, it is overlooked as leaders place more emphasis on practice-oriented ministry at the expense of scripture-oriented ministry. A significant culprit to a lack of contextualization is due to leaders seeing "an effective model of church flourish in one context and believe they only need to replicate that in order to reach the people in their context. They too avoid the hard work of studying their culture, and

³ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 14.

⁴ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 14.

⁵ David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds., *Mission Shift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B&h Academic, 2010), 73.

instead seek to import the work and conclusions drawn from a different context.”⁶ Commonly, this is noticed in preachers copying other preachers’ series, passages, illustrations and applications. It is tempting for leaders who see an effective and blessed ministry to simply copy and paste into their church. An over-emphasis on practice and outcome can default into an under-emphasis to exegete the culture. Mirroring what other churches are doing presumes that the cultural differences are non-existent or immaterial.

Contextualization in Selected Scriptures

Does the Bible give warrant to contextualize? A study of the following passages suggests that the Bible does in fact provide a biblical and theological foundation to contextualize. The author has chosen to explore the passages as presented herein rather than present the passages in chronological order; the author believes the stated order of the passages presents a logical flow to the argument.

Romans 1 and 2

Romans 1 and 2 provide the basis for contextualization.⁷ At the core of Paul’s theology of culture is his belief that God is present in all creation which includes cultures. All cultures reflect God’s goodness through general revelation. In fact, God’s “eternal power” and “divine nature” are visible to all people in every culture which in turn provides knowledge of the Creator.⁸ At the same time, culture is marred by human sin. There is no person without it. Because God’s “eternal

⁶ Ed Stetzer, "Calling For Contextualization: Part 1," The Exchange (blog), *Christianity Today*, June 21, 2010, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/june/calling-for-contextualization-part-1.html>.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 108.

⁸ Romans 1:19-20.

power” and “divine nature” are visible to all people, anyone without Christ stands without excuse before God. While sin is a deplorable element which knows no cultural boundary, every person in every cultural simultaneously has God’s law written on their hearts. Their consciences attest to what is righteous and sinful behavior.⁹ This can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit’s ministry rather than some human capacity. Thus, the Spirit is alive and active in all cultures. “Presumably, this takes place not only through peoples’ individual consciences, but also collectively, in human cultures and religions.”¹⁰

Culture is merely an expression of the people who live there, so every culture is made up of those who are enslaved to sin. “Cultures, along with their worldviews and social behaviors, are not simply neutral conduits for the gospel. They are riddled with the cancer of sin.”¹¹ The unrighteousness of culture is founded in human rebellion against God and replacing Him with a form of idolatry.¹²

These sin riddled cultures, notes Flemming, shape how its citizens answer questions such as: Why are we here? What are the most important things in life? What has supreme worth? In answering these questions, God’s wisdom and human foolishness are expressed in varying degree. Cultures diversely reflect their sinful tendencies. While the unbelieving Gentiles made the idol of sensuality of supreme worth, the Jews assigned greatest value to their idol of moral righteousness. They looked to something or someone they assigned the highest value in order for that thing or person to save them rather than the One true God.

⁹ Romans 2:14-15.

¹⁰ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 126.

¹¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 139.

¹² Romans 1:25.

Romans 2:14-15 is where the apostle Paul declared that God's law is written on the heart. All are created by the Creator in the image of God.¹³ Within the person, God has designed them with a sense of righteousness, justice and love. God's inscription upon the inner spirit means that somewhere hidden within the person, there is a God who is to be served. Every person in every culture is designed in this same way. While this knowledge of God is undiscovered by most.¹⁴ Some cultures are replete with people who possess it. God in his grace can remove the scales from any citizen thereby dramatically influencing any culture at any time He chooses.

While God continuously exhibits His general revelation to all people, it is His special revelation that He unlocks by the measure of His grace. Romans 1:18-25 demonstrates that general revelation or common grace is continually at work in people's lives. "The NIV translates verse 20 says 'since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities...have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse.' But the verbs νοούμενα, *nooumena* ("are being understood") and καθοράται, *kathoratai* ("are being seen") are in the form of present passive participles. The reality of God's nature and man's obligations to him are continuously present. General revelation is not just a set of innate ideas or static principles. It is the continuous and insistent pressure of God's truth on the consciousness of every human being."¹⁵ Because God is always at work at least through general revelation continuously influencing every person, God never ceases to shape and reshape cultures.

There is no perfect culture, nor is there any forsaken culture. Paul does not reject cultures as merely the consequence of the Fall, but rather Paul affirms contextualizing the Scriptures for

¹³ Genesis 1:26-28.

¹⁴ See Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, VII, A. J. Krailsheimer trans. (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 425.

¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 109.

each culture.¹⁶ Each culture has value due to general revelation and the presence of the Spirit. Paul does not stigmatize culture as hopelessly sinful, so that Christians should withdraw. Rather, he recognizes God's grace in human culture. As Flemming explains, "God values all cultures and because the gospel cannot be heard in the abstract apart from a cultural home, God must speak to the Jew as a Jew, to the Greek as a Greek, to the Filipino as a Filipino; to the Gen-X'er as a Gen-X'er."¹⁷ Cultural distinctions should not be rejected for simply being different, rather the presumption should be God has demonstrated his infinite goodness in varying ways. Neither are Christians called to exchange their worldly culture for an exclusively Christian culture. Rather, Christians are supposed to have one foot outside their own culture and the other remaining in the current culture. In the author's opinion, Christians are to function within their current culture as a "prophetic subculture," whose Christ-focused lives offer an alternative to the culture they live in.

Romans 1 and 2 are the basis for contextualization because God is present in every culture, yet in each of those cultures man has also made his sinful and idolatrous mark. It is the mixture of God's beautiful truth and man's resistance to truth that shapes the identity of each culture. This mixture is unique for each culture. When preachers understand and appreciate the unique mixture of their culture, then they will have exegeted the community and are ready to contextualize God's truth to a particular people. Flemming notes, "Like Paul, we must critique our own culture without rejecting it, and transcend our culture even while remaining in it. Likewise, we must be willing to identify with another's culture without uncritically accommodating to it; we must let the gospel speak transformationally to that culture without

¹⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 151

¹⁷ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 138.

imposing a foreign culture upon it. This is the calling of the missional church in every place and every generation.”¹⁸

1 Corinthians 8-10

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-10 outlines the motive for contextualization.¹⁹ The motive for contextualization is to remove all unnecessary offenses, thereby minimizing the number of obstacles to the Gospel. Churches should be flexible toward culture, ready to adapt in order to communicate the Word most effectively to a particular audience. While there may be biblical freedom, there are times when freedoms will have to be voluntarily limited to advance the gospel. All things may be legal, but not all things are beneficial. While the Bible may permit something, pursuing that freedom may be culturally insensitive making God’s truth more difficult to embrace.

An example that Paul used for this principle is found in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Jewish Christians purchased meat after it had been used in idol ceremonies. Jews saw nothing wrong with purchasing the meat because the idols were not real gods, so there was nothing wrong in eating the meat. The Gentile Christians stumbled; however, as they watched their brothers eating this meat that they used to offer to what they believed were real gods. Their consciences were convicted that eating this meat was ungodly. They did not have a clear conscience, but when they watched their Jewish brothers eating this meat they were tempted to eat the meat despite not having a clear conscience.

Paul agreed with the Jews that the Word gave them the theological right to eat the meat. The Gentile believers had weak consciences and were controlled by a strictly cultural taboo.

¹⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 151.

¹⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 77.

Paul's admonition to the Jewish believers was that despite being biblically correct, they should limit their freedom and not eat the meat for the sake of their weaker brother. They should refrain from eating the meat to remove the cultural offense and be culturally sensitive. "Cultural adaptation here is seen as an expression of love."²⁰ In 1 Corinthians 10:32:11:1, Paul identified a principle. Paul explains that the gospel good trumps one's personal good; that is, if one can advance the gospel by limiting some personal freedoms then that is a higher value. This is cultural adaptation. Christians will need to limit their freedoms when it comes to music, clothing, foods and other nonessential, non-gospel items or practices to advance the kingdom.

D.A. Carson agreed when he said, "Yet in every culture it is important for the evangelist, the church planter, and witnessing Christian to flex as far as possible, so that the gospel will not be made to appear unnecessarily alien at the merely cultural level."²¹ One's first instinct should be to culturally adapt when we have biblical freedoms if those adaptations make the gospel more accessible to others. This adaptation has only positive effect on sharing the gospel message, and it in no way minimizes Christ and the cross. This is the motive to contextualize.

Paul affirms adapting to cultural distinctiveness because disciples of Christ are motivated to see fruit from sharing the Gospel. Cultural sensitivity, according to Paul, is necessary to effectively communicate the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:21, Paul said he was willing to adapt to the context of the Jew and Gentile if it meant they could be won to Christ. Flemming asserts, "This is no less than an application of the incarnation principle; people only have access to the eternal God and the gospel of the crucified Christ through the particularity of culture. By

²⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 110.

²¹ D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 122.

voluntarily identifying with Jews and Gentiles, Paul validates their distinctive cultural commitments.”²²

As discussed earlier, those suspicious of contextualization point to the possibility of compromising God’s truth. They argue that contextualization may soften the challenge of the gospel in order not to offend people or make them too uncomfortable. While this possibility of softening the challenge of God’s Word is always possible, the goal of Biblical contextualization is not the number of people but genuine life change that can only occur when the entire Gospel is embraced. Biblical contextualization does not eliminate the offense, the σκάνδαλον (*skandalon*), of the cross.²³ There is a material difference between adapting to a culture and succumbing to a culture.

1 Corinthians 1

Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 provided a formula for contextualization.²⁴ In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul showed us how not to swing the pendulum too far to embracing an idolatrous culture or condemning such culture, but rather balance between affirming and confronting the culture. He adequately challenged their cultural idols while leaving the door open sufficiently to argue that only Christ could truly fulfill their appetites for righteousness and wisdom.

Because Paul did not outrightly condemn a culture’s idolatrous pursuits, he was able to use it as a starting point to draw common ground with his audience. Beginning with their religious language and shared idolatrous pursuits, he demonstrated that he understood the desires

²² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 127.

²³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

²⁴ Keller, *Center Church*, 108.

of the community. In this, Paul expressed context sensitivity. He did not stop there, for it was not their approval he was after. Rather, Paul helped people discover that the created thing or person they were pursuing would be limited and temporal. He helped them see a higher fulfillment of their aspirations. It is possible that what they valued was not wrong, but the goal of what they were pursuing was too low. When people were willing to be open for even greater fulfillment, they found Christ as their answer.

Keller explains:

Paul “confronts each culture for its idols, yet he positively highlights their aspirations and ultimate values. He uses the cross to challenge the intellectual hubris of the Greeks and the words-righteousness of the Jews. But he also affirms their most basic collective longings, showing that Christ alone is the true wisdom the Greeks have looked for and is the true righteousness that the Jews have sought. Paul’s approach to culture, then, is neither completely confrontational nor totally affirming. He does not simply rail against Greek pride in intellect and Jewish pride in power; instead he shows them that the ways they are pursuing these good things are ultimately self-defeating. He reveals the fatal contradictions and underlying idolatry within their cultures and then points them to the resolution that can only be found in Christ. This is the basic formula for contextualization.”²⁵

Paul’s contextualization formula was fleshed out with the Jews and Greeks. What is true in every culture in light of Romans 1 and 2 is that God’s goodness and man’s sinfulness are always realities. Certainly, this was true in the Jewish and Greek cultures as the Greeks idolized wisdom while the Jews idolized works of righteousness.²⁶ The Greeks placed highest value on wisdom, intellectualism, and philosophy.²⁷ A savior and his salvation that did not come through intellectually rigorous teaching and reflection but through a crucified savior would not satisfy the ways they understood to pursue wisdom. Contrast the Greeks with the Jews who placed their highest value on the miraculous, signs, power and strength. The Jews most highly valued the

²⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 112.

²⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 112.

²⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 112.

practical as they desired to see things get done. Suffering unto death on a cross to the Jews would not appear to be getting things done, but rather a true Savior would have overthrown the Roman authorities. When Paul contextualized to the Greek and the Jew, he did not condemn either of their idolatrous pursuits. Instead, Paul helped the Greeks see that the cross was the pinnacle of wisdom and philosophy, and for the Jews, Paul showed that Jesus' cross was not weakness but the greatest power that could defeat sin, guilt and death. In this, Paul demonstrated the effectiveness of his formula for contextualization.

Jesus

While the apostle Paul was inspired to write Romans and Corinthians thereby revealing biblical contextualization, the foundation of context-sensitivity is most brilliantly seen through the incarnation of Jesus. When Jesus took on the likeness of man, he demonstrated God's paradigm for a contextualized mission and theology. The Gospel of John declares how the eternal Jesus took on flesh.²⁸ He did this to reveal God the Father to humankind.²⁹ Paul described the depth of Jesus' contextualization into the human context: Jesus being born unto Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, was a male, Palestinian Jew, "born of a woman, born under the law."³⁰ Born and raised in the Jewish culture, Jesus was fully immersed in the Jewish culture; he participated and celebrated Jewish customs and holidays. He spoke Aramaic with a Galilean accent. In Philippians, Jesus is identified with people through his self-emptying and self-humbling on behalf of the people he came to serve and save.³¹ As Charles Kraft reflects, "God in Jesus became so

²⁸ John 1:14.

²⁹ John 1:18.

³⁰ Galatians 4:4.

³¹ Philippians 2:6-8.

much a part of a specific human context that many never even recognized that he had come from somewhere else.”³²

In C. Rene’ Padilla’s words, “It may be said that God has contextualized himself in Jesus Christ.”³³ God who knows all things had no need to contextualize himself through Christ into the Jewish culture. Yet, through the incarnation Jesus demonstrates that from immersing oneself in the culture one can share God’s truth in culturally sensitive ways. Jesus communicated through the common language and cultural traditions. He used every day, culturally relevant examples such as fishing, farming, weeds, wineskins, soil and salt. As Jesus presented new truth, he helped his audience bridge the new thought to their lives through his use of the common language, traditions and every day examples.

A sampling of examples of Jesus contextualizing his preaching is seen in how he spoke to the rich young ruler, Nicodemus, the woman at the well and to Peter. He tailored his message to the person, and it is safe to assume that Jesus’ different approaches with different people was intentional. With the rich young ruler, Jesus contextualized in a way to bring the man’s self-righteousness and self-satisfaction to the forefront. The desire was for this man to be convicted of his sin and need for a savior.³⁴ Jesus’ approach with the woman at the well was different. Jesus spent only a little time to bring her to a place of guilt and conviction for sin. Yet, Jesus is far gentler with this Samaritan woman and his ability to provide ultimate satisfaction.³⁵ Jesus is far more challenging and confrontational with Nicodemus because he was a teacher of the law. With

³² Charles H. Kraft and Marguerite G. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 175.

³³ C. René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 83.

³⁴ Matthew 19:16-26.

³⁵ John 4:1-45.

this educated teacher of the law, Jesus presented significant biblical content as well as an illustration of Moses that the teacher would have known well.³⁶ One of the greatest challenges came to one of Jesus' disciples. When Peter challenged Jesus to not speak of his death, Jesus' word choice to Peter revealed an intense confrontation.³⁷ Jesus spoke differently depending on the person and the circumstances. "The incarnation of Jesus makes contextualization not just a possibility but an obligation. It establishes a paradigm for mediating God's redeeming presence in the world today."³⁸

Jesus identified at least two prerequisites of contextualization. He called people to immerse themselves in their culture through compassion and humility. First, Jesus called his followers to be compassionate. "Be compassionate even as your Father is compassionate."³⁹ Compassion for people in a new community takes cultural intelligence and time for one's heart to connect with the people. This cannot be done from afar, but requires one to be in the community among the people. The meaning of compassion comes from the Latin "to suffer with." Jesus suffered with humanity. Going into a new community and coming alongside the people in order to suffer with them and among them grows our spirit of compassion for them.

Henri Nouwen defined compassion,

"The word compassion is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean "to suffer with." Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion with the condition of being human."⁴⁰

³⁶ John 3:1-15.

³⁷ Mark 8:31-38.

³⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 21.

³⁹ Luke 6:36.

⁴⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Compassion* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 4.

Compassion, or suffering with, is a first step in immersing oneself into a new culture thereby preparing to do contextualized ministry.

Through his incarnation, Jesus demonstrated another requirement of contextualization, and that is to choose humility. Context-sensitivity requires the attitude of humility, so that being compassionate becomes a possibility. Jesus chose to vacate heaven where he ruled and emptied himself to enter the human context. His life on earth revealed that leaving a place of harmony for dysfunction is the type of humility required. It requires a choice of leaving peace for chaos and messiness. The world is a broken place and God desires for us to press into the challenges and live among it, in order to be used by God and bring peace.

Fuder writes,

“God calls us to set aside our privilege and truly reside among those who have nothing, following Christ’s model in verse 7, ‘[Jesus] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men.’ He wants us to go from power to powerlessness. This is a difficult one because the real struggles in our lives often come down to power versus powerlessness. Yet according to verse 8, we know that Jesus ‘being found in appearance as a man...humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.’”⁴¹

Because Jesus humbled himself to leave the order and peace of heaven for the chaos and brokenness of earth, Jesus was able to then choose to be compassionate and suffer with the lost.

The case for contextualization is not limited to the New Testament through the incarnation of Jesus and the early church. The Old Testament has numerous examples that help build the philosophy and practice of contextualization. One such example is Esther.

⁴¹ John E. Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 74.

Esther

The book of Esther describes how God can use someone from outside a specific culture to be a divine instrument within that foreign culture. Esther was a person of influence in her Jewish sub-culture; nine times are recorded in the Book of Esther that she had been given God's favor. Through a series of events, God orchestrated for this Jewish girl to become queen of Persia. Even though as a Jew she was an outsider to the majority, she learned the culture, she knew the rules, and she chose to be in the culture but not of the culture.

While living in the Persian culture, she came to find out the desperate need of God's people. Haman's plot was to annihilate all the Jews.⁴² She was protected from this by being in the palace, yet she "writhed in great anguish".⁴³ God had prepared her with a heart of compassion, and she suffered with her people in her anguish. She could not endure the horrors that were about to come upon her people.⁴⁴

Esther's heart became like the heart of God filled with compassion for the people. Esther reached a point of desperation for the people in the community. In her time of prayer and fasting, God strengthened Esther. Esther counted the cost and was willing to give her life for her people. Her compassion birthed a deep humility for the Jews. A humility that transformed her to the likeness of God's heart willing to possibly sacrifice the ultimate price to save her people. After learning the Persian culture, Esther was not oblivious to the custom that she was not legally permitted to speak to the king in fact she could have been put to death for speaking to him. Simply knowing the culture does not make accomplishing God's mission easier. Rather, knowing

⁴² Esther 3:13.

⁴³ Esther 4:4.

⁴⁴ Esther 8:6.

the culture may in fact require more courage and commitment. With the reality that approaching the king of Persia on behalf of her people may mean death, her compassion and humility directed her to assume this risk for the people.⁴⁵

The Book of Acts: A Study of Paul's use of Contextualization

In Acts, Paul engaged in the work of contextualizing the Scriptures to varied audiences including Jews, God-fearers and pagans. Paul adapted his message with their culture and religious beliefs in mind. Does the experience of the early church seen throughout Paul's sermons in the book of Acts serve as a paradigm for contextualization?

Before Paul came into focus, the Holy Spirit laid a foundation in Acts for contextualization. Luke described how the Gospel progressively moved from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. At Pentecost, the apostles did not intentionally set out to contextualize the preaching of the Word. Yet, God had another plan. Flemming notes, "The focus in Acts is on witnessing to God's salvation in Jesus Christ, among Aramaic and Greek-speaking Jews, Samaritans, God-fearing Gentiles and finally pagans. The result is that fresh 'translations' of the gospel occur under the guidance of the Spirit as the word of God spans cultural, linguistic and religious boundaries."⁴⁶ People from "every nation under heaven"⁴⁷ heard the apostles declare the Gospel in their own languages due to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping*, 37.

⁴⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 30.

⁴⁷ Acts 2:5.

⁴⁸ Acts 2:4-11.

The book of Acts and more specifically the sermons of Paul present a strong case that his context-sensitivity and contextualizing Scriptures to different audiences is not merely historically descriptive, but, in fact, contextualizing God's message is prescriptive for today's preaching. Luke, in the book of Acts, seeks to illustrate how a Gentile Christian community was built and how Christians are to live in light of these patterns.⁴⁹

Keller notes about Paul's sermons,

"These speeches of Paul give us a strong biblical case for engaging in careful contextualization. They remind us that there is no universal, culture-free formulation of the gospel for everyone. The Scriptures show numerous instances when gospel truths are brought out in different orders, argued for using different premises, and applied to hearts in distinctive ways."⁵⁰

Acts is the only book of the Bible that contains Paul's sermons and speeches. Paul's epistles offer information about his principles of doctrine, the local church and preaching, but they contain no sermons. "Longinus classes the apostle Paul among the most celebrated orators of Greece. His speeches are worthy of the Roman senate...this great preacher adapted his discourses to the capacities of his respective audiences, with an astonishing degree of propriety and ability, as is evident from the difference of his reasoning with the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, with the Gentiles at Lystra, with the polished Athenians, and with Felix the Roman governor, as also from the handsome apology which he makes for himself before king Agrippa."⁵¹ The principal reason Paul varied his sermons was to optimize the effectiveness of God's Word in light of the cultural limitations every sinner possess. Paul modeled flexibility and cultural sensitivity. Paul did more

⁴⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 33.

⁵⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 114.

⁵¹ Thomas Hartwell Horn, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, vol 4., 4th Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Forgotten Books, 2016), 321.

than merely exhort disciples to become all things to all people. Paul demonstrated extraordinary deference, so that he could maximize the contextualization of God's message.⁵²

With the basis, motive and formula explained, the author moves to analyzing Paul's sermons. First, let's turn to Paul's first sermon which was presented to a primarily Jewish audience.

Acts 13:13-52

Acts 13:13-52 is the first of Paul's evangelistic sermons recorded in Acts, and the only sermon to a predominantly Jewish audience. This is Luke's introduction to the beginning of Paul's ministry. The remainder of Acts reveals the growth, maturity and conclusion of Paul's ministry. Through Acts 13, Luke signaled a critical juncture in God's story; it begins to reveal a pattern of Jewish rejection of the gospel, but a growing reception by Gentiles. Despite its limited impact on the Jewish audience, Paul's contextualized sermons based on shared belief in the Scriptures as well as a shared history represents his model sermon he preached in the synagogues.⁵³ Paul's custom to the Jews was to preach the Messiah's death and resurrection.⁵⁴

Paul's team arrived at a well-established Jewish community in the cosmopolitan Roman colony of Antioch. This first synagogue audience was filled with people who believed in the Scriptures; the audience included Jews, devout proselytes or Gentile converts,⁵⁵ and God-

⁵² When Paul was with Gentiles, he would eat like a Gentile and stay in their homes without deference to the Jewish dietary laws (Acts 11:26; 16:15, 34,40; 17:4-7). Yet, while working with Jews, he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

⁵³ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 57.

⁵⁴ Acts 17:2-3.

⁵⁵ Acts 13:43.

fearers.⁵⁶ Some degree of integration between Jews and Gentiles had occurred; Luke reports of the Jewish interaction and influence in local civic life.⁵⁷ These were Jews of the dispersion who had maintained the principal tenants of their faith, yet they had also been Hellenized to some degree.⁵⁸

One can deduce from Acts chapter 13 that these Gentiles of Antioch had become Jewish sympathizers and were in attendance because the witness of the Jews' faith and lifestyle was attractive to the Gentiles. This meant these Gentiles had turned away from their former pagan polytheistic religions. Some of these Gentiles would have become Jews through circumcision and observing the covenant obligations of Judaism.⁵⁹ The final group in attendance was known as God-fearers; they were somewhere between the devout proselytes and the rest of the pagan Gentiles in their faith and practice. God-fearers were Gentiles who believed "the monotheistic belief in Yahweh, imageless worship, observance of the Sabbath Synagogue attendance, observance of the Sabbath laws and the dietary laws but nevertheless had never formally declared their faith and become full proselytes."⁶⁰ God-fearers had changed their religious beliefs, yet they had not denied the ungodly aspects of their culture for to do so would mean to cut oneself off from their own people.⁶¹ The tension between their faith and their lifestyle was expressed in

⁵⁶ Acts 13:16, 26.

⁵⁷ Acts 13:50.

⁵⁸ Jay E. Adams, *Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 12.

⁵⁹ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 12.

⁶⁰ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 12

⁶¹ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 13.

believing one thing but living contrary to their beliefs. Paul's sermon is primarily targeted toward the Jews, yet Paul specifically singled out the God-fearers as part of the audience.⁶²

The setting for Paul's sermon is culturally appropriate. The synagogue was where the Diaspora Jews met as the center for religious and community life.⁶³ The synagogue congregation gathered for worship on the Sabbath anticipated the reading and teaching of God's Scriptures. According to custom, Paul was officially invited by the rulers of the synagogue to share a message.⁶⁴

Paul spoke to their unity as fellow Israelites and children of Abraham.⁶⁵ Flemming notes, "Paul speaks as a Diaspora Jew to fellow Diaspora Jews within the framework of the Jewish Scriptures and the worship of the God of Israel."⁶⁶ Paul made every effort to be sensitive to the context of the Jews in the Antioch synagogue. Tailoring one's speech to the specific audience was stressed in ancient rhetoric.⁶⁷ The rapport Paul built with his audience is seen in the progression of how he addressed them. He began formally with "men of Israel" and "our fathers."⁶⁸ As the sermon unfolded, Paul addressed them less formally as "brothers, sons of the family of

⁶² Acts 13:16, 26.

⁶³ Acts 13:13-52.

⁶⁴ Acts 13:15.

⁶⁵ Acts 13:16, 26.

⁶⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 58.

⁶⁷ Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 26-30.

⁶⁸ Acts 13:16.

Abraham.”⁶⁹ Paul was confident that he had contextualized his sermon to this audience and was in fact winning them over.⁷⁰

Further contextualization is seen as Paul was context sensitive by how he identified himself as an insider; he was one of them. Flemming explains, “In addition, the speech is brimming with language, themes and quotations from the Greek Old Testament.”⁷¹ Lastly, the structure of Paul’s sermon was adapted to conventional patterns of Greco-Roman rhetoric that included five elements: (1) a brief introduction, (2) a narration, (3) a proposition or thesis statement, (4) a proof, and (5) a concluding exhortation.⁷²

It was common practice for traveling preachers to present at synagogue services. Yet, it was completely uncommon for any of these traveling preachers to declare that Jesus whom the Jews had executed was in fact the Messiah. Did Paul cut to the chase and immediately declare the Gospel or did he take into consideration his audience and tailor the story of the Gospel in a way that would be most effective for them to hear? The heart of Paul’s message was the good news of Jesus, yet Paul proceeded gradually to this end. He did not immediately announce this news; he was not direct. Rather, Paul laid a foundation upon which he could share the truth of Jesus. Commonsense would lend itself to Paul predicting the Jewish response would be at best critical if not hostile to his message.

Paul began by demonstrating his knowledge and commitment to the Scriptures. He built a shared relationship with the audience through authors who they commonly accepted as biblical authorities. Paul laid out the historical development of God’s ultimate plan, so that he could

⁶⁹ Acts 13:26.

⁷⁰ Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 139.

⁷¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 58.

⁷² Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 407.

demonstrate that this was not a new teaching but instead the fulfillment of God's promise to His people. More specifically, Paul identified himself with his audience by using words such as "brethren," and "our fathers."

Adams described Paul's development:

"The gradual progression of his argument was achieved this way: In the first third of the sermon, Paul used the third person when referring to the past: "our fathers...", "them...", "they," etc., (verses 16-25); in the second third, he changed to the first person and the general present – what God has done for us in our day (verses 26-37). Finally, in the last third, he adopted the second person, calling his audience to personal decision in the immediate present: "you must understand..." "you are offered..." "your sins..." "you could never be found..." "take care..." "fall on you," (verses 38-41)."⁷³

With intentionality, Paul chose his words strategically to bring the Jewish audience on a journey from continued hopeful anticipation to present fulfillment.

Paul knew that he was speaking to a diverse audience with Jews, Gentiles and God-fearers since he mentioned these audiences in his Acts 13 sermon. He also knew that the most favorable response would not come from the Jews but rather the Gentiles and God-fearers.⁷⁴ In light of this, Paul individually addressed these specific groups. Twice he specifically referred to God-fearers.⁷⁵ He included this group when explaining how the promises of God were made and the message of salvation was sent. Paul's focus on the Greeks may possibly be why he stood to preach. Jewish teachers generally sat while teaching, and Greek speakers stood. While one may be unsure of why Paul stood to preach which would not have been customary practice in the synagogue, he may have stood in light of the Greeks in the congregation. Adams explains, "If

⁷³ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 15-16.

⁷⁴ Acts 13:26.

⁷⁵ Acts 13:16, 26,

they were present in significant numbers, it is possible that Paul may have assumed the posture out of consideration for them.”⁷⁶

Some would suggest the sermon was successful. He was immediately invited to return the following Sabbath to teach again. Some Christians in the early church found their way to Christ this way.⁷⁷ In fact, Paul’s two scenarios. first sermon of two sermons, resulted in a sufficient number of converts for Paul to plant a church.⁷⁸ Most likely, those in attendance would have been surprised when Paul preached that the Messiah was Jesus. They were surprised, yet they invited or “begged” Paul to return the following Sabbath to preach a second time.⁷⁹ There also were numerous private discussions following the service where people engaged the conversation with Paul.⁸⁰ The Spirit had moved and even Jews and devout converts to Judaism urged Paul to continue his ministry.

A week later, nearly the entire city gathered to hear Paul preach.⁸¹ Many Jews filled with jealousy contradicted Paul’s teaching and incited others to persecute Paul and Barnabas. Yet, many of the Gentiles rejoiced, glorified God and became disciples of Jesus.

Paul’s second sermon was presented to a different audience than was found in the synagogue.

⁷⁶ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 16.

⁷⁷ Acts 13:43.

⁷⁸ Acts 14:21-24.

⁷⁹ Acts 13:42.

⁸⁰ Acts 13:43.

⁸¹ Acts 13:44-52.

Acts 14:8-20

Upon reading all of Paul's speeches, Paul's preaching in Lystra (Acts 14) and Athens (Acts 17) are the only speeches in Acts targeted to pagan Gentiles. At Lystra, the people Paul preached to were uneducated, peasant polytheists. Luke recorded Paul's sermon that was cut short due to unforeseen circumstances. While these remarks in Lystra are far shorter than the lengthier speech in Athens, this mini-sermon has contextualization significance. It is Paul's first speech to a purely Gentile audience, and the only example of preaching to unsophisticated pagans.⁸²

Lystra had been a Roman colony since 6 B.C. and the reputation of the Lycaonians was that of "primitive rustics who lived in the cultural backwaters of the Greco-Roman civilization."⁸³ Luke portrays this group of Lycaonians as common people who were unsophisticated and simple who spoke in local the dialect.⁸⁴ The Lystran group is altogether distinguishable from the devout God-fearing Gentiles like those in Antioch. There is no evidence that this group had been materially influenced by Jewish Scriptures or the Greek philosophical schools.⁸⁵ Instead, Luke described them as sincere believers in the traditional Greek religion because their reaction to seeing a crippled man healed; their immediate response was to offer a sacrifice to Zeus and Hermes.⁸⁶ This Lycaonian group demonstrated no knowledge or appreciation for the biblical story

⁸² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 66.

⁸³ Dean P. Bechard, *Paul Among The Rustics: The Lystran Episode (Acts 14:8-20) And Lucan Apologetic*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 84-101.

⁸⁴ Acts 14:11.

⁸⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts of the Apostles*. In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9:436.

⁸⁶ Acts 14:13.

or the monotheistic worldview as one discerns from earlier preaching to the God-fearing Antioch Gentiles.

Since Lystra did not have a synagogue,⁸⁷ the setting for Paul's speech was in the streets like an itinerant philosopher a place that was not his usual custom.⁸⁸ There is no mention of the diaspora Jews or a gathering of Jews. So, Paul took his speaking to the streets. While speaking, Paul was used by God to heal a crippled man. The Lycaonians present appreciating the divine power of healing believed Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus because of the local myth that the gods of Hermes and Zeus had once before visited their region in human form.⁸⁹ Unfortunately and not surprisingly, the group only knew how to worship based on their polytheistic religion and local myths.

Flemming describes the story,

“According to the tale, when the two Olympians arrived in human form, a thousand homes refused them hospitality and were destroyed. Only an elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon, took them in and were spared. Apparently, the inhabitants of Lystra do not want to make the same mistake as their predecessors, so they prepare to honor Barnabas and Paul with a great sacrifice, according to the tradition of their local cult.”⁹⁰

In the midst of the pagan idolatry, there is hope. God enabled Paul to see that the crippled man had faith to be made well.⁹¹ This faith, of course, was a different faith than the city at large. Further, the crowd immediately recognized the divine healing, and their response was to worship. These varied responses would all have built into Paul's understanding of the Lycaonian culture.

⁸⁷ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2113.

⁸⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 362.

⁸⁹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2113.

⁹⁰ Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 67-68.

⁹¹ Acts 14:9.

The urgent response by the people to gather oxen for a sacrifice could not have been stopped sooner; most likely, Paul was unaware of what they were planning because they were speaking in their local dialect.⁹² It was only when Paul saw them bring oxen to offer a sacrifice that he was able to stop them.⁹³ When the mistaken identity was discovered and the offering stopped, Paul gave a strong message. Luke's recording of the message is quite brief, yet Paul upon speaking would have been expected to utilize the Greek style of rhetoric including introduction, narration and proof when speaking to this group and in fact he did.⁹⁴

In Acts 14:15, Paul cried out, "Men, why are you doing these things?"⁹⁵ Addressing them as "men" was appropriate rather than brothers as he did with Jewish and Christian audiences. Due to the immediacy of the circumstances and their desire to worship Paul and Barnabas through a sacrifice, Paul quickly moved to stop their sacrifice. The situation moved Paul more quickly into correcting their theological errors. More quickly than in other sermons, Paul pointed these polytheists to the One True God who made the heaven and the earth and all that is in them. In the sermon at Antioch, Paul built the rapport with the audience by speaking to a shared belief and history.⁹⁶ He did not have that same history with the Lycaonians, so he explained how he and Barnabas shared something essential with them - the same nature, same humanity. Paul showed them honor and respect rather than scolding when he placed himself and Barnabas in the same category as the audience as people created in the image of God. The appeal to this shared

⁹² Acts 14:11.

⁹³ Acts 14:14.

⁹⁴ Marianne Fournier, *The Episode at Lystra: A Rhetorical and Semiotic Analysis of Acts 14:7-20a* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 193.

⁹⁵ Acts 14:15.

⁹⁶ Acts 13:16-25.

humanity between the audience and himself built rapport while simultaneously, presented an argument against the idolatry of their sacrificial worship to anyone other than God.⁹⁷

There was one additional key truth Paul communicated in verse 15 – “and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God.” Paul was sharing the beginnings of the Gospel message. Flemming explains Paul’s five fundamental truths of his theological kerygma.⁹⁸ First, in light of the Lystran’s polytheistic belief, it was necessary to begin with the truth that God is monotheistic, one triune God. This was an essential starting point in the context of their polytheistic paradigm. Second, in verse 15 Paul leveraged the Old Testament creation language when he said, “a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”⁹⁹ Barrett explains that Paul uses scriptural language but did not provide the biblical citation presumably because it would not be known or a recognized authority.¹⁰⁰ Paul did not shy away from scriptural language when the audience was unfamiliar with it, because God’s words are truth and the Lycaonians eventually needed to learn God’s message. Third, in verse 16, Paul acknowledged in the past “he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.” Yet, this God Paul proclaimed is the God of all the nations rather than a national deity. Fourth, God revealed himself in every culture through general revelation. The Creator’s goodness is God’s silent witness to all people. Fifth, in verse 17, he explained how it was God who sent the rains that provided fruitful seasons that resulted in food and gladness. God is the provider to His people and the sustainer of His people.

⁹⁷ Acts 14:15.

⁹⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 69.

⁹⁹ Exodus 20:11; Psalm 146:6.

¹⁰⁰ C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:680.

Paul's method to contextualize in Lystra was to identify the Creator and His creation as the shared story between Paul and the Lystrans. Since they had not received special revelation from God or shared in Israel's story, God's provision of the basic needs of life was the story Paul shared because all of God's creatures have this in common.

Why did Paul not specifically point the Lycaonians to Christ? There is no question that Paul is committed to preaching the truth of Jesus and his death and resurrection.¹⁰¹ Further, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul's message of turning from idols to the living God ultimately involves the proclamation of Jesus. The question is faulty, for there is no reason to believe that Paul would preclude the sharing of Christ. In contextualizing to the Lystrans, Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, could not begin with the Scriptures or a shared nation chosen by God; instead, Paul had to begin his sermon not with Jesus but with the monotheistic God. Paul demonstrated that all the essential components of the Gospel need not be shared in every sermon, yet the Gospel was advanced as he pointed them away from their polytheistic pagan worldview toward the one true God.

The gospel shared with the Lystran pagans is different than what Paul shared with the Jews at the synagogue in Antioch. Since the Jews shared the same history with Paul and belief in the Scriptures, Paul could preach how the Messianic prophecy through the line of David was fulfilled in Jesus. The Lystran Gentiles did not have the historical background or religious beliefs to understand or appreciate such a theological argument. Alternatively, Paul contextualized his message to this particular audience by not immediately sharing Jesus; rather, he "begins at their most basic point of need – to acknowledge the one true Creator God."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Acts 13 and 16.

¹⁰² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 69.

Paul and Barnabas ultimately were able to restrain the Lystrans from sacrificing to them.¹⁰³ Just on the heels of that success, Jews traveling near 100 miles from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul to the point they thought he was dead.¹⁰⁴ When all seemed to be a disappointment, verse 20 reveals that Lystran disciples came to help Paul following the stoning. In the midst of the opposition, the presence of “disciples” reveals that there was some number of Lystrans who became believers. This was evidence that the Lord had “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”¹⁰⁵ One of these Lystran converts was none other than Timothy.¹⁰⁶ It is believed that Timothy, his mother and grandmother had received Christ upon Paul’s visit to Lystra.¹⁰⁷ Flemming writes “In this world of popular pagan piety, the Jewish-oriented arguments used in Antioch would have been both ineffective and incomprehensible. Paul must tailor both the emphasis and the expression of his evangelistic preaching to fit a crowd of rustic Gentile polytheists.”¹⁰⁸

Acts 17:16-34

Paul’s sermon to the Greek philosophers of Athens has been noted by many as possibly his most masterful sermon.¹⁰⁹ Paul shared the message of Christ’s resurrection with sophisticated pagans who had largely abandoned belief in literal gods; instead, they held to their philosophical

¹⁰³ Acts 14:18.

¹⁰⁴ Acts 14:19.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 14:27.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 16:1-2.

¹⁰⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, 2117.

¹⁰⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 71.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 26.

views of Stoicism and Epicureanism. While the Stoics idolized feelinglessness, the Epicureans identified pleasure as life's supreme goal. Stoics were pantheists who believed that matter was eternal; they also denied any belief in life beyond death. Epicureans agreed with Stoicism in that they rejected life after death, but they contrarily were atheistic materialists who denied creation and attributed life to a deterministic fate.¹¹⁰ Luke described the cultural context in verse 21: "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new."¹¹¹ Blaiklock described the Athenians as "Sophisticated supercilious, intellectually arrogant, living on, if not in, a cultural past..."¹¹²

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he preached in the synagogue to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and he witnessed to Athenians in the market place.¹¹³ When the philosophers caught wind of Paul's teaching, they brought him to the Areopagus.¹¹⁴ This was the Athenian senate. The Areopagus were one of the most celebrated tribunals in the world. Its decisions were highly respected.¹¹⁵ Among the matters they opined, they decided religious problems.¹¹⁶ One of its functions was to examine and license public lecturers.¹¹⁷ While the culture was favorable to espousing new ideas, there was an intellectual arrogance among those who

¹¹⁰ Adams, *Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul*, 27.

¹¹¹ Acts 17:21.

¹¹² E.M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles an Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 31.

¹¹³ Acts 17:16-17.

¹¹⁴ Acts 17:19.

¹¹⁵ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes Explanatory and Practical, on the Acts of the Apostles*, 20th ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858), 244.

¹¹⁶ C.H. Rieu, *The Acts of the Apostles by St. Luke* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1957), 152.

¹¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles the Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 923.

called Paul a “babbler” in verse 18. The word for babbler is σπερμολόγος (*spermologos*), and it is Athenian slang which captures the idea of “one who pecks at ideas like a chick pecks at seeds and then spouts them off without fully understanding them.”¹¹⁸ Paul’s audience for his speech was certainly mixed.

The Athenians disrespect for Paul was matched by the indignation aroused in him at the sight of idols everywhere in the city. Yet, Paul remained calm and cool. He had learned that he could not begin by denouncing the spiritual atrocities or convince strangers by mere dogmatic assertion.¹¹⁹ Jefferson wrote, “Paul was a model of courtesy.”¹²⁰ He had learned that he had to withstand personal criticism in order to become a “Greek to the Greeks.” One should not anticipate honor and decency from a culture far from God. The longer view of influencing a culture for Christ must far outweigh the shorter view of one’s own feelings.

Paul’s masterful introduction is a prime example of contextualization. There must have been a myriad of thoughts and emotions running through Paul as he was appalled by the idolatry, engaged in witnessing throughout the marketplace, ridiculed by the philosophers and now presented to the Athenian authorities who 400 years earlier condemned Socrates to death for introducing new gods. People had begun to say similar things of Paul that were said of Socrates. It is Paul’s contextualized introduction that sowed the seed for the Gospel while avoiding a direct confrontation. Immediately, he disarmed the opposition while exposing the deficiency in their

¹¹⁸ *ESV Study Bible*, 2177

¹¹⁹ Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, 246.

¹²⁰ Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Character of Paul* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927), 190.

gods. Rather than say he is introducing new gods, Paul shared that he declared the God whom they already worshipped without knowing him.¹²¹

Paul began his address in a friendly manner commending their interest in religion. Despite the apparent tension between Paul and the Athenians, he took time to honestly commend them for their spiritual interest as he saw their objects of worship. It is interesting to note the different approach Paul took with the Athenians than at Lystra where he met idolatry unsympathetically, and he was nearly stoned to death.¹²² There is no confusion that Paul was indignant with the Athenian idolatry, but Paul demonstrated far more control over his emotions in Athens than in Lystra.

With much composure, Paul then referenced the altar to the unknown God. His careful choice of contextualized introductory remarks accomplished several objectives. First, he evaded the charge of introducing strange gods. Second, he positioned himself to make an argument for the One true God. Third, he created dissonance in the audience, as he identified an area they professed to be ignorant. “In other circumstances, it might seem to be presumptuous for an unknown Jew to attempt to instruct the sages of Athens. But here they had confessed and proclaimed their ignorance. By rearing this altar, they acknowledged their need of instruction.”¹²³

Once the dissonance had been created, Paul did not immediately move into special revelation but rather general revelation.¹²⁴ While Paul began with general revelation for both non-Jewish audiences in Athens and Lystra, Paul appears to have moved more slowly to the heart of his argument in Athens than at Lystra. This would have given the listeners more time to connect

¹²¹ Acts 17:23.

¹²² Acts 14:19.

¹²³ Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, 247.

¹²⁴ Acts 17:24.

with Paul, understand his reasoning and be persuaded. One significant difference between the two audiences was people in Lystra would have been far simpler than the sophisticated Athenians.

The differences in Paul's illustrations reveal that he contextualized uniquely to each audience. In Lystra, he illustrated using elements of food and rain where in Athens he illustrated by way of Greek poetry.¹²⁵ Quoting the Greek poets demonstrated his personal familiarity with Greek culture, and it appealed to the Athenians.¹²⁶ Yet, it was far more strategic than merely flirting with the culture. Edith Hamilton contends that Greek religion was not developed by the priests or the prophets, but rather it was developed by the poets.¹²⁷ Greek poetry was religious authority. Paul quoted from the works of Epimenides, Cleanthes and Aratus; the latter two were Stoics, and Aratus' work was so well thought of that commentaries were written on it.¹²⁸ As Adams points out, "Paul's use of these poets was devastating. By it, he had condemned their sin of idolatry on their own grounds."¹²⁹ Paul provided an interpretation of the Greek poetry that found its ultimate fulfillment in the Triune God. He demonstrated that the Greek poets were scratching at something that could only be discerned by the Spirit. Adams explains, "The use of the Greek poets was certainly an attempt to become a Greek to the Greeks (not by "buying" Greek views, but by using them strategically) while the use of these specific poets, and the use of these particular questions from them shows even greater skill at audience adaptation."¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Acts 14:17; Acts 17:28.

¹²⁶ Reiu, *The Acts of the Apostles by St. Luke*, 152.

¹²⁷ Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way to Western Civilization* (New York: the New American Library, 1951), 159.

¹²⁸ Barnes, *Barnes Notes*, 250.

¹²⁹ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 33.

¹³⁰ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 33.

While contextualization is not merely determined upon the response of the listeners, the Athenian response demonstrated that Paul effectively adapted to his audience. First, the Areopagus did not condemn Paul for teaching strange gods. Second, some people responded with a desire to hear Paul teach again. Third, some people were granted the faith to believe unto salvation. Expectedly, some mocked and laughed at Paul's teaching.¹³¹

Paul's use of the philosophical language of his audience certainly develops a connection and common ground, but more than that the genius of Paul's contextualization is that he used their ideas and language to transform their worldview.¹³² Paul took familiar terminology "co-opted and infused with new meaning in light of biblical revelation and the Christ event."¹³³

Flemming explains how in verse 28, Paul reinterpreted the words of the poets:

"We are God's 'offspring,' not in a Stoic pantheistic sense, but rather in a biblical sense of being created in the image of God. The quotation then becomes the platform for Paul's critique of pagan idolatry: if the living God has made us in his image, we surely cannot create 'gods' out of lifeless objects (Acts 17:29). Likewise, in Acts 17:27, 'seeking God' is not a philosophical quest through which God could be easily known from examining nature, as the Stoics believed. Rather Paul perceives the religious seeking of the Greeks as a groping search, a fumbling in the darkness, which awaits fulfillment in the gospel of the risen One."¹³⁴

Up until Acts 17:30-31, Paul had effectively identified with the Athenian audience by highlighting points of agreement and quoting Greek poetry. All that was to take the audience on an ascent to the pinnacle in verses 30-31 where Paul unveiled who it is that the altar with the unknown God ultimately spoke of – Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead, and he called all people to repent of their polytheistic idolatry and be rightly related to God through Christ. At this pinnacle, "only now does he bring the Athenian eye to eye with the crux of the gospel, God's

¹³¹ Acts 17:32-34.

¹³² Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 79.

¹³³ Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 79.

¹³⁴ Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 79-80.

saving action in the risen Christ....”¹³⁵ Paul waited to the conclusion of his speech only after laying a strong groundwork of contextualizing to the audience to land on the controversial subject of Jesus and the resurrection.

It is interesting to note that Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel in Acts 17 highlighted the resurrection and not his death on the cross; nowhere in his speech did Paul teach on Jesus’ arrest, trials and crucifixion. Rather, Paul focused on Jesus’ resurrection and final judgment. Some will no doubt contend that a discussion of his resurrection implies that he had to have died. While that is true, Paul spent no time sharing the theological necessity of the God-Man’s death. The focus on the resurrection rather than the death appears to be entirely context appropriate, for the very reason the philosophers brought him to the Areopagus was for teaching the resurrection.¹³⁶ Once again, Paul’s speech does not contain all of the elements of the gospel, instead, he focused on the elements of the gospel that were sensitive to the context.

Acts 20:16-38

In Acts 20:16-38, Paul preached the only example of a sermon delivered to a Christian audience in the New Testament.¹³⁷ These Ephesian elders were the fruit of Paul’s evangelism and three years of discipleship. God could not have assembled a friendlier audience for Paul to preach to, for these men from a human lens, owed their salvation and discipleship to him. Most likely, Paul could have preached anything to these Christians; in fact, they may have been some of his

¹³⁵ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 80.

¹³⁶ Acts 17:18-20.

¹³⁷ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 36.

closest friendships. However, Paul was aware that these may have been his final words to dear brothers. Certainly, he desired to make a deep and lasting impression.

Paul's emotional farewell address was adapted for this special group of believers. In this sermon, Paul covered four topics: his personal example and testimony, his obedience to the Spirit's compulsion to move onto the next location of inevitable suffering, his warning of coming heretical attacks against God's truth in order to protect the church, and his encouragement to maintain a proper attitude toward material goods. Five elements are commonly recommended for farewell speeches: emotional appeals, previous connection with the group, identification of the new work, hope of seeing the group in the future, and the final farewell.¹³⁸ Paul effectively communicated each of the five components. From the choice of topic to the style of delivery, Paul tailored this speech differently from other sermons to strongly share how he poured himself out for them, so that they would heed his words of both warning and inspiration.¹³⁹

Acts 21:27-22:22

In Acts 21:27-22:22, Paul spoke to a hostile Jewish mob. Jews from Asia falsely accused Paul of violating a serious crime by bringing an uncircumcised Gentile into the temple. These Jews may have been from Ephesus where they knew Paul and his work.¹⁴⁰ This crime was punishable by death to the Gentile trespasser, not the Jew. With no Gentile in view, the Jews turned their violence upon Paul. They had already begun hitting Paul with the intent of killing him.¹⁴¹ Word came to the Romans of the uproar, and soldiers intervened to stop the attack. Once

¹³⁸ Loren Reid, *First Principles of Public Speaking* (Columbia, MO: Artcraft Press, 1960), 273.

¹³⁹ Acts 20:18-19.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 21:29.

¹⁴¹ Acts 21:33, 31.

the Romans discovered that Paul was not who the Jews accused him of being, they consented to his desire to speak to the angry Jewish mob.

The language Paul spoke was the language of the mob. When they heard him speaking in Hebrew, they became quiet.¹⁴² In this common tongue, he provided his personal testimony of his Jewish heritage. In sharing that he had been one of the greatest enemies of the Way, he communicated that he understood why they had attacked him.¹⁴³ At this juncture, Paul shared his conversion from Judaism to Christianity.

Paul adapted to his challenging audience and contextualized his message. In an effort to not further antagonize his audience, Paul shared his story and stressed his Jewishness via language, citizenship, upbringing, education, and profession. He attempted to connect with the mob by understanding why they reacted so strongly, for he also reacted strongly at a time against the Way. When Paul turned the corner of his conversion, he continued contextualizing to the hostile group by intentionally not mentioning the name of Jesus more than once; instead, Paul referred to Jesus as “the Righteous One” or merely “He.” Further, by delaying specific mention until the end of the address, one can appreciate that he desired to delay any discussion of his calling to reach the Gentiles.¹⁴⁴ Amplifying this delay can be seen in verse 15, when Paul modified Jesus’ words from “Gentiles” to “everyone.”¹⁴⁵ Strategically, Paul initially built commonality and relationship rather than immediately launching into challenge and confrontation. He sought to expand the area of agreement in prayerful hope that these Jews may

¹⁴² Acts 22:2.

¹⁴³ Acts 22:4-6.

¹⁴⁴ Acts 22:21.

¹⁴⁵ Acts 22:15.

see and experience what he himself had. Adams writes, “Audience adaptation, then, not only involves knowledge of the right things to say, but also the wisdom about what not to say.”¹⁴⁶

Paul demonstrated context sensitivity in delaying the discussion of evangelizing Gentiles, yet he was unwilling to compromise God’s truth. When he finally shared his commissioning to the Gentiles, their hysteria returned and their voices roared shouting that he should not live.¹⁴⁷ The Romans once again saved Paul from the mob.¹⁴⁸ There is no report of any desiring to hear Paul speak again or as in Athens some coming to saving faith.

Acts 23:1-11

Since the Romans were unable to scourge Paul due to his Roman citizenship, they turned for help to the Sanhedrin. Paul was quite familiar with the council, for Paul had been a member of the body and its chief hatchet man against the Way.¹⁴⁹ Before Paul’s appearance, Jesus, Peter and John, the twelve apostles and Stephen had all been unjustly tried. Certainly, Paul did not anticipate any departure from their previous unjust rulings, for he knew of the council’s hatred for Jesus, the church and its hatred for Paul in particular. There was one more key fact that Paul knew about the council, it was composed of two bitterly opposed religious groups: the orthodox Pharisees and the liberal Sadducees.

With his audience, clearly in view and no likelihood of prevailing, Paul adapted his speech to divide the council against itself thereby pitting the Pharisees against the Sadducees. Paul immediately declared himself to be a Pharisee aligning himself only with half of the council

¹⁴⁶ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Acts 22:22-23.

¹⁴⁸ Acts 22:24.

¹⁴⁹ William L. Watkinson, *Moral Paradox of St. Paul* (New York: Revell), 199.

and exposing the council's disunity.¹⁵⁰ Paul deepened the wedge between the two groups by isolating the controversial issue at hand as the resurrection of the dead.¹⁵¹ Bartlet put it this way, "Paul, discerning that the only way to evade a formal hostile decision...was to take advantage of the theological differences between his foes, threw an apple of discord into the midst."¹⁵² While the Pharisees believed the Old Testament Scriptures of the resurrection and judgement of the dead, the Sadducees rejected any resurrection as well as angels and spirits.¹⁵³ The strategy was to divide theologically the council, since Paul did not believe it possible to receive a fair hearing or just decision. At best, Paul hoped for a split decision – better yet, splitting the court. Adams argues, "The 'ruse' or 'apple of discord' was an extremely clever and successful mode of Audience Adaptation: 'divide and conquer.' Paul knew the 'enemy.' He knew where his weakness was. And with one, smooth, well-aimed, stone, he slew Goliath."¹⁵⁴

Verse 7 reveals that Paul's statements successfully brought out the underlying tension that pre-existed among the two groups of the council. While the dispute intensified, the division widened in verse 9 when a Pharisee argued on behalf of Paul that an angel or spirit could have revealed the teaching of the resurrection of the dead. In fact, some from the Pharisaical part of the council declared that they found nothing wrong in Paul. This, in turn, led to such violent dissension within the council, the Roman tribune took Paul away to save his life.¹⁵⁵ Through his adept context sensitivity, Paul accomplished his goal to prevent the court from another unjust

¹⁵⁰ Acts 23:6.

¹⁵¹ Acts 23:6.

¹⁵² James Vernon Bartlet, *The Apostolic Age Its Life, Doctrine, Worship and Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 163-164.

¹⁵³ *ESV Study Bible*, 2135.

¹⁵⁴ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 49.

¹⁵⁵ Acts 23:10.

ruling that could have condemned him. Paul successfully divided the council with some of the Pharisees declaring that they saw nothing wrong in Paul.

Conclusion

Clearly, Paul did not use a singular approach to his sermons and speeches for contextualization. He demonstrated sensitivity in each context. The audience's language, heritage, religious upbringing and the occasion for the speech were all taken into consideration by Paul as he determined content and delivery.

Sermon after sermon reveals more than a description of Paul's approach to contextualization, rather it prescribes adaptation to cultural intelligence for all communicators of God's Word. For example, he emphasized specific portions of the gospel in light of what that particular audience needed first. This was determined by the required starting point. Preaching to Jews in a synagogue who shared the same Scriptures and historical story required a different starting point than polytheists who have no knowledge of the Scriptures or the history of God's people.

Keller notes,

"Paul's citation of authority varies with changing audiences. With Bible believers, he quotes Scripture and John the Baptist; with pagans, he argues from general revelation and the greatness of creation. The biblical content in his presentation varies as well, depending on the audience. He changes the order in which various truths are introduced, as well as the emphasis he gives to different points of theology. With Jews and God-fearers, Paul spends little time on the doctrine of God and gets right to Christ. but with pagans, he concentrates most of his time on developing the concept of God. With Greeks and Romans, Paul goes to Christ's resurrection first – not the cross."¹⁵⁶

Reduce the span of difference between two audience groups such as in Lystra and Athens, and one appreciates how Paul contextualized differently. While Paul adapted to simple townspeople and peasants in Acts 14 where he spoke of God being the ultimate provider of rain

¹⁵⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 113.

and crops leading to gladness, in Acts 17 Paul's speech spoke of God's creation and provision in a more sophisticated argument using Greek philosophy and poetry. Paul far more bluntly challenged the Lystran polytheism by simply calling them to turn from worthless idols and toward the living God; yet, he took a subtler approach with the Athenians explaining the gospel as a higher level of fulfillment of their religious pursuits.

When it came to speaking about sin, Paul adapted his message to the hearers without compromising the truth of Scriptures. Paul is clear in his message to the Jews, the law cannot justify, moral effort cannot save.¹⁵⁷ To those who adhered to Scripture, he challenged them to realize that while they think they are good, they are not good enough to meet God's perfect standards. To the Pagans, he urged them to turn from worthless idols to God who is the ultimate source of what they were searching for.¹⁵⁸ Adams observes, "Paul varies his use of emotion and reason, his vocabulary, his introductions and conclusions, his figures of speech and illustrations, his identification of his audience concerns, hopes, and needs. In every case he adapts his gospel presentation to his hearers."¹⁵⁹

Despite these cultural adaptations, Paul did not compromise when it came to the content of the gospel. Paul understood the Scriptures to have common elements: (1) He consistently shared with audiences how their understanding of God was deficient. To the Jews, he explained that they had misunderstood God's Word. To the Gentiles, he challenged their understanding of the world and how they missed God's fingerprints on creation. (2) Paul also consistently taught how all have sinned due to falling short of God's perfect standard. There was nothing either Jew or Gentile could do to save themselves. (3) Paul shared that Christ was the only solution to their

¹⁵⁷ Acts 13:39.

¹⁵⁸ Acts 14:15-17.

¹⁵⁹ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 61.

sin. It is noted that the full gospel is not clearly laid out in every speech; however, at least one or more of the components of the Gospel are communicated in each speech. The speech may have been cut short due to circumstances, and Paul may have recognized that it would take more than one speech, in one sitting, to effectively share the Gospel. As David Peterson states, “The messianic kingship of Jesus and its implications remains the core of the message to pagan audiences, though the terminology and approach are very different from the preaching to Jews or Gentiles who were familiar with the Jewish Scriptures.”¹⁶⁰

The Scriptures especially Paul’s writings and sermons, Esther and Jesus present a compelling case for contextualized preaching. Many authors have explored this topic as the author presents in the following chapter.

¹⁶⁰ David Peterson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary, The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 44.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Greater spiritual harvests may be reaped, in the author's opinion, with more intentionally contextualized preaching. Multisite churches, in particular, would experience greater influence-based leadership in communities by freeing up their campus pastors to preach God's Word in a contextualized way for their campuses.¹ While numerous multisite churches are already experiencing God's blessings, the question is whether there is an even greater harvest with contextualized preaching. Commonly, multisite churches' emphasis to be "one church" comes at the cost of the diminution of contextualized preaching.²

Stetzer concurs that under contextualized preaching inherently limits their leadership influence:

It's one thing to know the gospel, but it's another to make the gospel known. And making the gospel known is more complicated in America today than it was in decades past. Less people today have a general Christian orientation, or even a shared Judeo-Christian ethic. This means concepts (truths) like sin, death and hell cannot be assumed. So, when we want to communicate the gospel and deal with categories like God, man, Christ and faith we must not only know them well, but also how to effectively make them known to the people God has sent us. Knowing where to begin and how to explain the truth to particular people are issues of contextualization.³

¹ This conclusion has been drawn from working with twenty multisite churches across the country over the past five years.

² This conclusion has been drawn from numerous informal conversations with other multisite churches across the country over the past five years.

³ Ed Stetzer, "Calling For Contextualization, Part 3: Knowing And Making Known The Gospel," The Exchange (blog), *Christianity Today*, July 20, 2010, accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/july/calling-for-contextualization-part-3-knowing-and-making.html>.

Placing something in a specific context is known as contextualization. Wu provides this definition - excellent contextualization of God's Word is the presentation of unchanging biblical truths in a meaningful way for contemporary cultures.⁴ The integrity of God's message must be most highly valued while illustrating and applying such truths in specific ways that enable hearers within a culture to understand and respond. Stetzer opines that contextualization is not a matter of discretion but of necessity: "Contextualization matters because we are not eternal, timeless, and a-cultural. Some of the ways we worship, how we present eternal truths, and how we live in and relate to society all must be considered. We live in a culture. How we see things, understand them, and present them to others must take culture into account."⁵ Despite the clarion call to contextualize, Flemming describes many preachers who mistakenly see a false dichotomy between protecting the veracity of Scripture at the expense of context sensitivity; the suspicion is that contextualization leads to biblical compromise.⁶

Since a person can only experience Christianity in a local form rather than a universal form, Walls argues against generic, a-cultural sermonizing: "No one ever meets universal Christianity in itself: we only ever meet Christianity in a local form and that means a historically, culturally conditioned form."⁷ While Scripture in one sense is universal truth for all cultures, Flemming describes the Bible as a contextualized writing; God contextualized Himself in the incarnation of Jesus as well as the Biblical authors who contextualized their messages to specific

⁴ Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 72.

⁵ Ed Stetzer, "Calling For Contextualization: Part 2, The Need To Contend And Contextualize," *The Exchange* (blog), *Christianity Today*, June 28, 2010, accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/june/calling-for-contextualization-part-2-need-to-contend-and.html>.

⁶ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 14.

⁷ A. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 235.

audiences.⁸ The question, therefore, is why do preachers neglect this vital key to unlocking greater meaningfulness to their messages? Keller appeals to preachers for a closer examination of the need for contextualization: “Most books and chapters on gospel contextualization are (to me) frustratingly impractical. Christian leaders are therefore (1) ignorant of the very idea of contextualization, (2) naively against it, or (3) for it but don’t know how to do it. As a result, most contextualization happens passively, and in this way we enculturate the gospel in all sorts of unconscious and unfruitful ways.”⁹

Well written books on the topic of contextualization have not resulted in practical rubrics to develop contextualized sermons. The goal of this thesis is to advance the topic of intentional and purposeful contextualization in the hope of bringing greater awareness to the multisite community by the way of offering a practical working rubric for contextualizing sermons.

One possible argument against contextualization is that the authority of God’s holy Scripture transcends all cultural contexts. Simply teaching the Bible is enough, for the Word will contextualize on its own. Wu challenges this premise in asking, “Are we biblically faithful if our gospel message is not culturally meaningful?”¹⁰ It is possible that there is an underlying fear for some preachers who oppose contextualization.

Wu describes this unfounded fear:

Simply put, people struggle to reconcile the relationship between the Bible and culture. Everyone would agree that both are critical. Still, affirming their importance doesn’t tell us what to do. How do people know when they have confused the biblical text with the cultural context (i.e., syncretism)? Because evangelicals are committed to the authority of Scripture, they want to avoid this danger. While trying to be biblically faithful, one can fall into another, more

⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 15.

⁹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 119.

¹⁰ Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), xviii.

subtle problem. One can be content to present a true message that is practically irrelevant to his or her listeners.¹¹

Allowing the over-realized fear of syncretism to edge out context-sensitivity is unacceptable. Fuder urges that the church see contextualization as imperative, so that it more adequately exegetes the communities that it preaches.¹² Properly analyzing communities equips preachers “to ‘diagnose’ needs and apply the proper ‘dose’ of the gospel to meet those opportunities.”¹³ The diagnosis and dose need to be culturally relevant otherwise a misdiagnosis will result in an under-dosage or over-dosage. It is common for cultures to not only differ but at times hold contrary views.

Harvie Conn explains how cultures can view the same truth from exact opposite ends of the spectrum:

We use the term ‘culture’ to refer to the common ideas, feelings and values that guide community and personal behavior, that organize and regulate what the group thinks, feels, and does about God, the world, and humanity. It explains why the Sawi people of Irian Jaya regard betrayal as a virtue, while the American sees it as a vice. It undergirds the Korean horror at the idea of Westerners’ placing their elderly parents in retirement homes, and Western horror at the idea of the Korean veneration of their ancestors. It is the climate of opinion that encourages an Eskimo to share his wife with a guest and hides the wife of an Iranian fundamentalist Muslim in a body-length veil.¹⁴

Presenting truth without sensitivity to the context could in fact create misunderstanding and opposition.

¹¹ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xix.

¹² John E. Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 13.

¹³ Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Harvie M. Conn as quoted by Ed Stetzer, "What Is Contextualization? Presenting The Gospel In Culturally Relevant Ways," The Exchange (blog), *Christianity Today*, October 12, 2014, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/what-is-contextualization.html>.

Contextualized preaching in a one campus church or multisite church is not a new idea; yet, because multisite campuses are often geographically close, the cultural nuances can be easily overlooked. Stetzer explains, “The practice [of contextualization] has been going on since the church was birthed. The terminology was developed as missiology became a more formalized discipline. Thus, in 1938, the International Missionary Council would affirm that: An indigenous church, young or old, in the East or in the West, is a church which, rooted in obedience to Christ, spontaneously uses forms of thought and modes of action natural and familiar in its own environment.”¹⁵ The reality of the need of indigenization has been known for quite some time on the foreign mission field. Missionaries are required to consider their culture and its idols and seek to contextualize the teaching of God’s Word. The greater the cultural dissonance a missionary experiences the more intentional they learn, appreciate and adapt to the new culture. Yet, churches or multisite campuses that are geographically closer to each other often lack that cultural dissonance and are presumed to be more similar when in fact there may be distinctive cultural differences that are neglected. Regrettably, North American churches are discouraged from exegeting communities as we require of international missionaries. Stetzer concurs, “Thus, one would expect that a biblically faithful indigenous church would look different in Senegal and Singapore. However, one must also expect an indigenous church to look different in Seattle and Savannah. Indigenous churches look different from location to location.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ed Stetzer, "Calling For Contextualization, Part 5: Indigenization," The Exchange (blog), *Christianity Today*, August 23, 2010, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/august/calling-for-contextualization-part-5-indigenization.html>.

¹⁶ Stetzer, *Calling For Contextualization, Part 5: Indigenization*.

Overview

In the previous chapter, the only three sermons the Bible records of the apostle Paul were scrutinized. Flemming boldly concludes after examining Paul's sermons as well as the incarnation of Jesus that contextualization is not only described in the Bible but prescribed for communicators of God's Word.¹⁷ Flemming supports his conclusion by explaining that the authoritative Scriptures themselves were contextually penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to communicate God's message to maximize the meaningfulness of the message.¹⁸ Despite the biblical justification for contextualized preaching and the far-reaching support among practitioners, Wu confronts the issue of this paper, "yet no one quite agrees on what it is and how to do it."¹⁹ What is missing from the body of literature on contextualized preaching is a "practical model for actually doing it."²⁰

Keller agrees with Wu that while what has been written on the topic has been important and helpful, it also is frustratingly impractical. The implication of a failure to provide practical contextualization models results in boring sermons that are "doctrinally accurate but utterly irrelevant" as preachers continue to fail to adapt to culture (under-contextualizing), and they continue to fail to confront culture (over-contextualizing).²¹ "A boring sermon is boring because it fails to bring the truth into the listener's daily life and world. It does not connect biblical truth to the hopes, narratives, fears, and errors of people in that particular time and place. It does not

¹⁷ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 21.

¹⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 15.

¹⁹ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xxii.

²⁰ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xxii.

²¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

help the listener to even want Christianity to be true. In other words, the sermon fails at contextualizing the biblical truth for the hearers.”²²

In light of the volumes of literature and this author’s desire to make it available and practical, this chapter will center on four topics: (1) a preacher’s rubric for contextualizing sermons, (2) phase one of the rubric: preacher, know the Bible, yourself and your culture, (2) phase two of the rubric: understand and appreciate the new culture through the scriptural lens of the rubric, and (3) phase three of the rubric: develop a contextualization strategy.

The Contextualization Rubric: A Practical Tool for Preachers

The biblical and cultural justification for contextualized preaching has been set forth, yet there is another compelling argument for a practical tool for preachers. Wu explains the dangers of the lack of a rubric: “It is important to understand that ‘all theology is contextualized theology.’ We all interpret the Bible from a cultural perspective. We all live within particular social contexts. Contextualization is both inevitable and essential. Therefore, Christians need to intentionally consider the influence of culture on their theology.”²³ In fact, without intentionally using such a rubric, preachers will continue to “come to the text with limited and culturally biased perspectives.”²⁴ The preacher’s bias has the potential to be more counterproductive than one may think.

Wu deepens the understanding of the preacher’s bias:

A person presents the message according to a certain set of organizing principles that emerge from one’s cultural and personal perspective. These principles often go unrecognized and serve as a filter that determines our implicit gospel. An ‘implicit gospel’ refers to the subtle message we don’t realize we are preaching...For example, a stereotypical Western gospel presentation especially highlights the personal relationship

²² Keller, *Center Church*, 89-90.

²³ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xxii.

²⁴ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xxiii.

with God, individual diversity, identity based on differences, God as judge, and the law as the metaphorical language of right and wrong. Through reading the same book – the Bible – a possible ‘Eastern’ presentation might stress group, harmony, or unity, identity based on similarity to others, God as Father or King, and could employ honor/shame language to discuss morality. It is possible that our ‘implicit gospel’ has greater influence on our listener than does our ‘explicit gospel.’²⁵

Contextualization begins before any communication to an audience. In fact, it begins with interpreting the Bible. One’s interpretation of Scripture is through a cultural lens. Wu explains, “Our cultural perspective can either open up the text, giving fresh insight, or it might hide certain facets of a passage that are unfamiliar to our own experience.”²⁶ Vanhoozer offers insight to help Western preachers overcome the inherent bias in their interpretation, “Western theologians must be aware of the cultural beams in their own eyes before attempting to remove specks from non-Western eyes. It is ultimately for the sake of better biblical interpretation that Western theologians need to pay attention to how the Bible is being read and practiced in the non-Western world.”²⁷ Nichols concurs with Wu and Vanhoozer that all theology is contextualized, “it is now widely accepted that all theology, including biblical theology, is culturally conditioned and therefore in some sense relative.”²⁸ Clark explains why, “All interpretation begins with the assumptions, values, beliefs, and experiences that a reader brings to the text.”²⁹

Considering that preachers are contextualized beings and their interpretation, communication and application of Scripture is filtered through their personal cultural lens, it is

²⁵ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, xxiv-xxv.

²⁶ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 6.

²⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer, "One Rule To Rule Them All: Theological Method In An Era Of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 116.

²⁸ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver, BC, Canada: Regent College, 2003), 25.

²⁹ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 107.

imperative they become far more intentional about the contextualization process. Sills encourages far more attention be given to a practical solution, “If one does not contextualize, he is doing just that – changing the gospel. He becomes a modern-day Judaizer. He is in effect telling his hearers that they must become like him to be saved.”³⁰

The rubric proposed has the goal to help preachers with a practical tool that will equip them to prepare contextualized sermons that are both faithful to Scripture and meaningful for a local culture. In order to achieve this goal, Wu offered an analogy that uses firmness to honor the uncompromising nature of Scripture and flexibility to adapt to different cultures.³¹ The analogy is a wheel with two primary components – a firm rim and a flexible rubber tire. The rim is firm giving the wheel shape, and it is the essential framework. The rubber tire is flexible and can contour to the road.³² In the firm rim, Wu identifies three themes for gospel presentations – creation, covenant and kingdom.³³ In the flexible rubber, he identifies theological ideas including: curse/blessing, honor/shame, redemption, justification, adoption, sacrifice, unity and law.³⁴

The wheel including a firm rim and a flexible rubber tire is a great starting place. This thesis recommends several modifications to Wu’s wheel analogy. To prevent over-contextualization where syncretism sets in, the spokes of the rim should be identified as the central elements of Scripture and the Gospel. The spokes of God’s message can be discussed in a variety of ways, yet this author would set forth five spokes that are foundational: (1) God, (2)

³⁰ M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010), 198.

³¹ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 88.

³² Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 89.

³³ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 89.

³⁴ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 90.

Creation, (3) Fall, (4) Redemption and (5) Restoration.³⁵ At the center of the rim is the foundation for all the spokes, and that is the Bible. As previously discussed in chapter two, Paul used these five spokes throughout his sermons in Acts chapters 13, 14 and 17.

Wu's metaphor of the tire is easily understood, yet his utilization of the tire may be too narrowing and over complicated for preachers. It is the author's opinion that each church should be able to design the rubric around their common language, beginning with the gospel.



FIGURE 1. RUBRIC TEMPLATE.

³⁵ Tim Keller, "Tim Keller Explains," *The Gospel in All its Forms* (blog), *Acts29.com*, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.acts29.com/tim-keller-explains-the-gospel/>.

The benefit of this analogy is that the rim can be modified to fit the preacher and church's identified spoke elements as well as nomenclature. For example, Wu proposed three spokes – creation, covenant and kingdom, yet this author used different spokes. The rim can be modified to have more or fewer spokes with similar or different identifications of elements of God's message.

Rubric Phase 1: Preacher, Know the Bible, Yourself and Your Culture

Before beginning contextualization of messages to new cultures, preachers should examine themselves and the culture from which they have been shaped. Every person is a contextualized being, for each has a cultural narrative, a historical story, and a cultural grammar. There is not a time that a person speaks that is not contextualized. Unfortunately, this contextualization is unintentional and the preacher is unwary of it. Keller explains that self-awareness to predisposed cultural biases is essential, "One of the biggest barriers to effective contextualization is the invisibility of our own cultural assumptions. Sometimes this blindness makes us disdainful of other cultures, particularly when we come to new cultures that are not wholly alien."³⁶ For example, when a person moves to a completely foreign culture, then the person knows he/she must work to understand culture and adapt. However, if a person moves simply to another community, they do not think about the need to understand culture and adapt. Rather they keep their current lens and judge the new community based on their existing cultural standards. If we cannot see our own cultural biases this will limit a person from contextualizing.³⁷

The first goal is for preachers to become increasingly self-aware. Throughout this phase, the wheel analogy will become more fully developed.

³⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 121.

³⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 121.

Spiritual Self-Awareness

The beginning of intentional contextualization is for the preacher to gain greater self-awareness as it relates to their identified spokes to God's message throughout Scripture. Once those spokes are outlined, the rubric calls for the preacher to fill in the topics and themes that the preacher often returns to in order to more fully explain, develop and deepen the spoke of the message.

Beginning with the rim, preachers are invited to identify the number of spokes they rely on to communicate the elements of God's gospel message. While they may vary from preacher to preacher, this author has identified five spokes: (1) God, (2) Creation, (3) Fall, (4) Redemption and (5) Restoration. At the center of the rim is the Bible. With the rim firmly in place, the rubric invites preachers to fill in the rubber tire with the relevant topic areas they often pull from to teach the respective spoke elements. The wheel analogy can now be modified to begin filling in potential topic areas in the rubber tire. In this author's opinion, modifying Wu's tire metaphor in this way makes it less narrowing and less complicated allowing each preacher and church to modify the rim and rubber to their needs. In fact, these slight adjustments allow the tire to be contextualized to the preacher. See the figure 2 below for an example how preachers may fill in the flexible rubber tire with topics.



FIGURE 2. RUBRIC PHASE ONE

Completing Phase One of this rubric is an essential first step, because it may expose a preacher's "implicit gospel." Further, even the explicit gospel is not a-cultural as Lesslie Newbigin explains, "We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture."³⁸ This first phase of the rubric begins to reveal the underpinning interpretation and hermeneutical contextualization of the preacher.

³⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 144.

Once the preacher has identified the essential elements of God's message and the relevant topic areas, they have constructed the first layer of intentional contextualization. Before moving onto phase two of the rubric, a few additional comments should be shared about the preacher's cultural and church self-awareness. Keller explains, "Cultural intelligence requires that we have a deep understanding of our own culture and how it shapes us."³⁹

Church Self-awareness

Not only are preachers contextualized beings, they also work for churches who are contextualized. In addition to a preacher personally being limited in the degree of contextualization they can do, the church they work for potentially adds another limit to the degree of contextualization. One area in which the church may limit contextualization is in defining of the spokes to the Scripture and Gospel message. The author has shared his five elements of God's message to include: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. However, the identification of the five spokes may not be left to the preacher, instead the church may have already chosen and named its spoke elements. The preacher who works for a church who has done this must adapt to the church culture. Further, some churches will further define and limit the topic areas in the rubber tire. For example, a church may specifically limit the creation spoke to be six literal twenty-four days while another church may explain that God is the creator but purposefully say less about the specifics of how and when God created the heavens and the earth. While the preacher may have views that are distinguishable from the church, he will most likely be given little latitude to teach anything contrary to the church's doctrine.

Churches define themselves in numerous ways. A church's doctrine statement, the bylaws and constitution, the philosophy of ministries, the vision, mission and strategy statements,

³⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 121.

the core values, unstated but known expectations are most of the items that go into making the “DNA” of the church or what makes that church unique. A church’s DNA establishes guidelines or some might call them guardrails; preachers and multisite campus pastors are expected to stay within the DNA lane. Multisite churches say that they are one church in many locations. Being “one church” is a foundational underlining to the DNA of a multisite church. Regardless of the number of campuses, a multisite church generally seeks to have the same DNA for all campuses regardless of the cultural differences. It would not be uncommon for specific campuses to experience greater challenge to stay within the DNA lane because certain cultural differences were not anticipated when the DNA was established by the founding campus. When a preacher completes phase one of the contextualization rubric, they will need to limit or expand the key topic areas in the rubber tire based on their church’s view.

Effective contextualization of the God’s message to new and distinct cultures demands preachers to first know themselves and their culture. Preachers who have worked through this first phase of the rubric are now prepared to move to the second phase.

Rubric Phase 2: Understand and Appreciate the New Culture

Before entering a new culture, it is important to begin identifying goals and outcomes. Without stated goals and outcomes, the concern for preachers is that they must immerse themselves into the culture to learn everything possible. Allowing the depth and degree of cultural exegesis to become undefinable causes some preachers to think it is beyond their grasp. Keller’s advice while brilliant is also intimidating: “The first step in active contextualization is to understand and, as much as possible, identify with your listeners, the people you are seeking to reach. This begins with a diligent (and never-ending) effort to become as fluent in their social,

linguistic, and cultural reality as possible.”⁴⁰ Preachers often have little margin for more in their schedules. If they interpret contextualization to require full immersion, that it is never-ending, and their goal is to articulate the residents’ views better than they can articulate them, preachers may be hesitant or even scared off from contextualization.

Identifying the target for preachers as they enter new cultures should be straight forward and doable with a reasonable amount of effort. While the process never ends and the preacher can continue to grow in cultural sensitivity, there will need to be fruit quickly in the process. Phase two of the contextualization rubric provides a concrete way to understand and appreciate the new culture.

Without the rubric, learning a new culture may appear daunting. Contextualization authors call for preachers to become fluent in the new culture’s “regionality, nationality, culture, language, ethnicity, social and economic status, political structures, education, gender, age, religious or theological tradition, worldview or values.”⁴¹ Further, the preacher must learn how to express people’s hopes, objections, fears and beliefs so well that they could not express them any better.⁴² The question this author asked was whether there was a method to help preachers that limited the scope, so that preachers were not being asked to become cultural analysts. Further, whether there was a tool that began with the preachers’ language and understanding more tailored to the preacher’s goal of communicating the one message God provides in His Scripture.

Phase two of the rubric allows preachers to exegete their communities through the spoke elements of the Scripture and Gospel. Preachers have one message; it is the message God provided through Scripture. Instead of exegeting the culture’s history, economy, politics,

⁴⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 120.

⁴¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 20.

⁴² Keller, *Center Church*, 120.

educational institutions, housing statistics to name just a few, the preacher would analyze culture through the lens of the five spoke elements. Neither the apostle Paul nor anyone else through Scripture examined culture to the degree and depth some of the authors recommend. Rather, it appears based on chapter two of this thesis that Paul exegeted culture through the lens of the five spoke elements of Scripture: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.

Applying the Five Spoke Elements of God's Message

The first spoke element of the gospel is God Himself. In chapter 2, Paul's sermon contextualization was examined in Antioch, Lystra and Athens.⁴³ In Antioch, the predominant audience was Jewish; they believed in a monotheistic God.⁴⁴ Further, they believed in the Scriptures that prophesied a coming Messiah. However, in Lystra and Athens, the Greeks were polytheists; Paul began with their misunderstanding of God before he discussed redemption.⁴⁵

Using the five spoke rim, beginning with the spoke of God, the preacher exegetes the culture to determine the cultural views, beliefs, fears and objections of God. While each culture will be nuanced in its answers just as Antioch was different from Lystra, a working list will be developed to demonstrate examples. Today's cultures have atheists, agnostics, deists, materialists, and many others. While people may understand God is all-powerful, they are unsure whether He is personal enough to care specifically for them. Some of the idols or functional gods include affluence, success, family, security, and physical health. There is also confusion regarding the triune God; the biblical knowledge and acceptance vary as to understanding of who the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are as co-equal persons of God. Using spoke one – God – the

⁴³ Acts 13:13-52; 14:8-20, 17:16-34.

⁴⁴ Acts 13:16.

⁴⁵ Acts 14:11-12; 14:15.

preacher exegetes the culture's views, beliefs, fears and objections about who and how they see "god." By understanding these topic areas that are outlined in the rubber tire (Figure 3 below), the preacher will be equipped to contextualize the sermon by choosing the topic from the flexible rubber tire area that would meaningfully develop this culture's biblical understanding of God.

The second spoke element is Creation. In Antioch, because the Jewish audience already believed the monotheistic God created the heavens and the earth, Paul was able to jump to their shared history.⁴⁶ However, in Lystra and Athens where residents believed in many gods, Paul took time to teach that the One True God, who is God for all nations, was the Creator of the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them.⁴⁷ This same God brought rain to nourish the crops that brought forth food and gladness.⁴⁸

Using the five spoke rim, specifically the spoke of Creation, the preacher analyzes the culture to determine the cultural views, beliefs, fears and objections of God. Today's cultures have numerous potential topic areas that would fill in the rubber tire of the creation spoke. There are the common topics such as young earth and old earth. Some ask: why did God create humans, how did God make us like Himself, why did God create two genders and whether God created evil? People question: if creation is intrinsically evil and whether God's people should mix with it. Others see creation in everything – that is, they are creators – this is diluting the distinction between creator and creature. Educational institutions are teaching students the "faith" of evolution; also, key religious institutions teach a theistic-creation account. By recognizing the relevant topics in one's culture (Figure 3 below), the preacher can pick and choose the optimal

⁴⁶ Acts 13:15:25.

⁴⁷ Acts 14:15-16.

⁴⁸ Acts 14:17.

topic areas to contextualize the sermon that would develop this culture's understanding of the spoke of Creation.

The third spoke element is the Fall. In Antioch, Paul confronted the audience with their spiritual community begin guilty of the sin of executing the Messiah.⁴⁹ In Lystra, Paul confronted the Lycaonians with the sin of sacrificing to false gods.⁵⁰ In Athens, Paul confronted the Greeks with the responsibility to repent for their sinfulness.⁵¹

Using the five spoke rim, specifically the spoke of the fall, the preacher determines the cultural views of sin. Potential topic areas include: what is sin, where did it come from, do we inherit a sin nature from Adam, are the sins of the father put upon the children. Cultural awareness may reveal humanism; there is intrinsic goodness in humankind. Another key topic area is the view of evil in the other person; it is easy to identify sin in anyone but oneself. Also, fatalism where what will be will be and there is nothing anyone can do to change it. Nihilism plagues some cultures where their view is life and sin is meaningless. A more common urban view is that of sin being forced upon a person rather than the person choosing the sin.

The fourth spoke element is Redemption. Paul shared more fully at the synagogue in Antioch that Jesus is the promised Messiah, his death offered forgiveness of sins and his resurrection demonstrated power over death.⁵² Paul shared nothing of this redemption spoke in Lystra and only Jesus' resurrection in Athens.⁵³

⁴⁹ Acts 13:27-28.

⁵⁰ Acts 14:14-15.

⁵¹ Acts 17:30.

⁵² Acts 13:28-30.

⁵³ Acts 17:31.

Using the five spoke rim, specifically the spoke of the fall, the preacher determines the cultural views of redemption. As one considers the various topic areas that cultural exegesis may include: why did God choose us, are some not chosen, what is the gospel message, what does it mean to be born again, what is true repentance, and can people accept Jesus as savior and not as lord. Additional topics include: the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice, works-based salvation a pull ourselves up by our bootstraps mentality, whether baptism is a necessary component of faith for salvation, and am I saved because my parents believed.

The fifth spoke element is Restoration. Paul preached that the Athenians should repent, for a day is coming that the risen Christ would return to judge sin and evil.⁵⁴ Using the five spoke rim, specifically the spoke of the restoration, the preacher will discover numerous cultural views of restoration including: what is the purpose of death in the Christian life, what happens to the human body and soul after death, when will a gloried body be given to the believer and what will they be like. Struggles in culture will also include that there is no hope to rectify the evil in the world, some see their lifetime as the achievement of their functional gods such as reaching a level of affluence and security they have arrived never to worry about these things again – they've achieved the gods they chased after. Additional common cultural views include: God will be gracious and allow all people into heaven, a focus on self-help and behavior modification where the focus is more on people changing themselves, and the ultimate goal for all people is to get along and be comfortable.

At the center of the rim is the Bible, God's holy and authoritative Scripture. The authority of God's Word is essential to determine the five spoke elements. As Paul preached in Antioch, the audience shared Paul's regard for Scripture as authority.⁵⁵ However, people in Lystra and

⁵⁴ Acts 17:30-31.

⁵⁵ Acts 13:15.

Athens did not know or regard Scripture as authoritative. Today, some see the Bible as one of many legitimate sources of authority, but the Bible may not have higher priority than something like the Catechism or even Dianetics. Some view that there are threads of truth in everything. Interestingly, Paul does not bring up or point to Scripture in Lystra or Athens as they had no knowledge or respect for such authority. Rather, Paul points them to the evidence of God through general revelation.⁵⁶ Preachers will not always be permitted to presume Scripture is the authority. In fact, Paul used cultural authority of the poets in Athens.⁵⁷ Without citing Scripture as a higher authority, Paul reasoned theologically beginning with the poets then taking them to the thoughts of God.⁵⁸

Considering these cultural topics as they relate to the five spokes of God's message, people have real questions and they need honest answers. Keller justifies phase two of the cultural exegesis, "Truth should not be simply declared into a vacuum – it must be delivered as a response to the questions of a particular people, and this means understanding their culture."⁵⁹ People are not the same in every area, they have different needs, different questions, and different struggles. To make God's message most meaningful in different cultures will demand that we have enough compassion to learn the issues, questions, and concerns of the particular community that God has led us to shepherd. While spokes are firm and will not be compromised, there are numerous areas in sermons that can be shaped by the questions and struggles of culture.

⁵⁶ Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-26.

⁵⁷ Acts 17:28.

⁵⁸ Acts 17:29.

⁵⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 120.



FIGURE 3. RUBRIC PHASE TWO

Preachers will communicate messages that will offend people. When preachers offend, they need to figure out if it was God's truth that caused the offense, or whether it was statements that the preacher made wherein he assumed beliefs of listeners and did not carefully clarify or qualify. If a preacher does not know enough about the beliefs, fears, prejudices of listeners, unnecessarily offensive things can be said. When preaching the Bible with the clearly defined lens of that culture, then taking their needs, beliefs, fears and hopes to the Word will make God's message more relevant and meaningful.

The rubber tire is able to contour to the different facets of each unique culture. The preacher entering a new culture is to help the people move from where they are to where God has called them. This is not usually moving from point A to point B, but rather there is a journey the Bible speaks of that will be examined in the next section.

Orientation – Disorientation – New Orientation

With what mindset does a preacher enter a new culture? Certainly, one would not expect nor desire a preacher to enter a new culture as a blank slate or *tabula rasa*, because God's Word has already shaped the preacher. In fact, the first phase of the contextualization rubric is essential for this reason. The preacher must increasingly grow in competency of understanding and application of the Scripture. Phase one of the rubric sets forth that which the preacher is unwilling to compromise to adapt to the new culture. Phase one has the preacher identify how they understand the spoke elements of God's message, and it has the preacher fill in the key topic areas that bring greater clarity to the spokes. Only with these spokes to the rim identified and the rubber tire sections adequately fleshed in should a preacher begin the process of intentional contextualization.

While phase one identifies that which will not be compromised, there is much in and about the preacher than can undergo cultural transformation. Walter Brueggemann's writing on orientation, disorientation and reorientation offers a framework for the mindset of the preacher.⁶⁰ Brueggemann suggests that people regularly find themselves in one of three places: a place of orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives; a place of disorientation, where we perceive we have sunk into the pit; and a place of new orientation, in which we realize that God

⁶⁰ Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and The Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," *JSOT* 17 (January 01, 1980): 3-31.

has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place with gratitude and a greater awareness about our lives and our God.

Using these three “places,” Brueggemann suggests that life has a rhythm as we move from one place to the next. Prior to going into a new culture, residents of the new cultures are in a place of orientation. As the preacher moves through the contextualization rubric, he will identify limits in the cultural narrative. In effect, the preacher will expose the false gospels of culture and the inability of the culture to ever reach its ultimate goals. This will bring the residents to the place of disorientation. This is not a negative reality, but rather a place of dissonance. There is great value when the preacher realizes and appreciates the similarities and differences with the new culture. The place of disorientation need not be a place where the preacher and community remain, but instead as the preacher gains cultural intelligence he can begin to map a journey from disorientation toward new orientation. The new orientation is the final phase of the rubric. This is a place where the preacher while never giving up the uncompromising spokes of God’s message begins to shape the new culture bringing it to a new orientation.⁶¹

The journey downward toward disorientation and before arriving at new orientation can be quite uncomfortable because change is involved. Scripture offers several truths that are especially helpful. In chapter two, it was shared how Jesus was seen demonstrating immersing himself in a new culture with compassion and humility. Jesus’ call to enter a new culture with compassion is a call to suffer with that community.⁶² Compassion will take the preacher to places of fear, brokenness and pain for compassion weeps with those who weep. Suffering with the people of a new culture will connect the preacher’s heart with the community’s heart. Further,

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Psalms and The Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function*, 5-8.

⁶² Henri Nouwen, *Compassion* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 4.

Jesus demonstrated how contextualization requires humility. Simply leaving a place of orientation for disorientation is an act of humility. The preacher must anticipate and prepare his heart for the place of disorientation will involve messiness and brokenness. Humility requires an attitude of being quick to listen and slow to speak.⁶³

Phase one and two of the contextualization rubric have been completed. As we move to phase three, it will equip the preacher to develop a strategy for contextualization.

Rubric Phase 3: Develop a Strategy for Contextualization

Visionary leadership requires the ability to see beyond the initial steps; vision leans upon the prophetic to see a desirable future outcome. Keller advises that the beginnings of a contextualization strategy would plan sympathetically to enter the culture well before confronting its deficiencies; however, a strategy must also anticipate cultural resistance.⁶⁴ There is an on-going relationship of investing relationally and calibrating the degree to challenge the culture. Challenge is often met with resistance which should be countered with even more relationship building prior to more challenge.⁶⁵ The strategy must account for this constant iteration of relationship and challenge. Without thoroughly processing and preparing for cultural resistance, the preacher may retreat to being too sympathetic and capitulate to the culture. For example, if a preacher highly values approval, then he may not be equipped to lead change and cultural transformation because he may not be sufficiently confident to withstand the pushback during the disorientation phase.

⁶³ James 1:19.

⁶⁴ Keller, *Center Church*, 124.

⁶⁵ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 16-22.

Flemming outlines that an effective contextualization strategy will avoid cultural captivity and its outcome of syncretism.⁶⁶ Neglecting context-sensitivity makes the preacher irrelevant while prioritizing culture over the Word loses its Christian identity and distinctiveness.⁶⁷ Contextualization is a two-edged sword, for there is risk and reward. It is dangerous if the content of the gospel is modified; and, it is necessary to make the message meaningful. This tightrope must be navigated with great discernment.

Gilliland described the precarious balance,

Contextualization [is] a delicate enterprise if ever there was one...the evangelist and mission strategist stand on a razor's edge, aware that to fall on either side has terrible consequences...Fall to the right and you end in obscurantism, so attached to your conventional ways of practicing and teaching the faith that you veil its truth and power from those who are trying to see it through very different eyes. Slip to the left and you tumble into syncretism, so vulnerable to the impact of paganism in its multiplicity of forms that you compromise the uniqueness of Christ and concoct 'another gospel which is not a gospel.'⁶⁸

The contextualization rubric was developed to safeguard first the truth and accuracy of God's Word from human error in over-contextualization. Phase one of the rubric identifies the five spokes of the gospel establishing true North for the contextualization compass. Phase two involves the preacher entering the new culture to analyze it in terms of the five gospel spokes. Lastly, we arrive at phase three where the preacher using the rubric with cultural rim spokes engages in contextualization through adaptation of the sermons. For Phase one and Phase two, the gospel spokes remained the same; however, in Phase three the five spokes change. This change is needed to assist the preacher in adapting to communicate a culturally sensitive sermon. The five cultural spokes which are evident in Paul's three sermons include: identifying the culture's

⁶⁶ Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 34.

⁶⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 119

⁶⁸ Dean S. Gilliland, *Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission*, in *The Word Among Us*, Dean S. Gilliland ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 10-11.

narrative and functional gods, creating common ground through a shared story, using cultural language and grammar, integrating cultural illustrations, and overcoming the culture's limitations of functional gods by offering possibilities to reach their objectives ultimately through Christ.



FIGURE 4. RUBRIC PHASE THREE

With the new five cultural rim spokes in place, let's examine them one at a time. These five cultural spokes take the personal/church self-awareness from phase one and the cultural exegesis acquired through the five spokes from phase two of the rubric and filter them through a practical tool that will assist in shaping contextualized sermons.

Identify the Cultural Narrative and Functional Gods

The first spoke of phase three is observing the questions residents are asking and the answers their culture is providing. Every culture is made up of different people. Yet, all people regardless of culture ask similar questions.⁶⁹ Their questions are: Why are we here? What are the most important things in life? What is wrong with the world? What will put things right? While the questions are often similar for every culture, the answers can vary significantly. Keller explained, “Every society considers something of supreme worth; accordingly, they seek to bring their environment into service to it. No culture is neutral on these matters and in this sense all cultural work can be said to ‘covenantal’ – we are all committed to something, even when those presuppositions and assumptions aren’t consciously identified.”⁷⁰ The apostle Paul when preaching in Athens brought to the culture’s attention that they were worshiping a god that they did not know.⁷¹ Similarly, the preacher must help people understand who or what they have been placing their hope in either implicitly or explicitly.⁷²

The discovery of these functional gods will take many paths. One approach is to look for beliefs that are held by people in the community that are not dependent on Christianity. For example, God may have given common grace, and they value humility expressed in turning the other cheek. Another example this author discovered in his hometown is the general and widespread agreement for generosity in giving and serving charitable organizations. On the other hand, there will be a set of beliefs connected to Christianity that will not be generally embraced by the community. For example, the biblical requirements related to sexuality. Preachers must

⁶⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 121-122.

⁷⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 108.

⁷¹ Acts 17:23.

⁷² Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 72.

intentionally look for cultural beliefs that affirm God's Word and widespread actions that deny Scripture. Wu describes this step as searching for "false gospels that plague a local setting."⁷³ Wu discusses the role of functional gods in a culture, "Local cultures have functional gods and false ideologies that claim certain achievements and make promises. How are people supposed to respond to those idols in order to reap a benefit? Positively, these questions assist us in giving a holistic and meaningful gospel presentation."⁷⁴ In order to determine who these functional gods are in a local culture, one asks who in the cultural narrative receives people's highest praise and loyalty?

Illustrating a few examples will be helpful to demonstrate how varying cultures have views and beliefs that are not ultimately based in Christ. First, the American narrative is a false gospel where some have placed their faith. They believe in moving forward, and the inevitable progress of society. Goals of this cultural narrative include bringing change, making things great again, and better days are ahead. This false gospel offers the promise of affluence and influence upon arriving at the illusive ideal of financial independence. Working harder and longer hours is the means by which people believe they will ultimately achieve the American dream.

An urban narrative may include "hood rich and making it." The goal is not climbing the corporate ladder; instead, it is "making it" like the guy seen wearing Air Jordan shoes and has \$600 in his pocket. One may also see a general distrust of organizational leadership such as government agencies, school boards, and churches because residents have experienced abuse at the hands of people in power. Instead, their hope and faith is placed in seeing themselves "making it."

⁷³ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 72.

⁷⁴ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 72.

The first step of phase three of the rubric is to identify and articulate the views, beliefs and values that help contribute toward the cultural narrative. The second step of phase three is to build bridges between the preacher and the culture through shared stories.

Shared Story

As seen in chapter two, in each of Paul's three sermons, he identified realities about the culture he was preaching to and used it as a shared story between him and the audience. For example, in Antioch, Paul articulated the shared story that he and the predominantly Jewish audience possessed.⁷⁵ In Lystra, Paul shared the story of the One true Creator made the same earth and sea and everything that lived in them.⁷⁶ In fact, they shared the same humanity and same nature.⁷⁷ Flemming points out the importance of making connections with an audience, "Paul takes advantage of similarities between the Jewish Scriptures and Hellenistic thought in order to construct apologetic bridges to his listeners."⁷⁸ Paul was quite observant to identify the cultural narrative, and then use it as a launching pad to develop relationship. "Paul thus begins where his audience is and builds on as much common territory as possible. Rather than demeaning their belief system or condemning their religiosity, he recognizes there is something genuine in their religious aspirations and felt needs, and he uses them as stepping stones for communicating the gospel."⁷⁹ Keller concurs that Paul did not dismiss the views, beliefs and

⁷⁵ Acts 13:26-25.

⁷⁶ Acts 14:15.

⁷⁷ Acts 14:15.

⁷⁸ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 77

⁷⁹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 76

goals of a culture even if misguided, instead he affirms them.⁸⁰ For example, in Athens Paul affirmed their religious pursuit even though they were worshiping idols.⁸¹

Preachers who build bridges with shared stories begin with beliefs they see in the culture and can affirm; the affirmation may be the underlying principle rather than the obvious expression. A culture that highly values family, parenting and relationships should be affirmed and shown how the bible supports their beliefs. If the culture highly values individual human rights and justice, the preacher could show that God is the historical and logical foundation for human rights. Prior to challenging the culture with its limits and deficiencies, commonly held beliefs by both believers and unbelievers should be explicitly commended. In doing so, the preacher is building bridges strong enough to also bring challenge to the limits of its cultural narrative.

Language

In addition to building bridges with the culture through shared story, the preacher should multiply his connection by taking advantage of the cultural language and grammar spoken in the culture. Paul demonstrated this; with a Jewish audience, Paul spoke Hebrew.⁸² Paul adapted his language and grammar to the context. In addition to spoken language, Paul showed that Scripture known by the audience is a form of language they had in common.⁸³ Also, Paul showed that Greek poetry known by the audience is a form of language they had in common.⁸⁴ In Antioch,

⁸⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 124.

⁸¹ Acts 17:22-23.

⁸² Acts 21:27-22:22.

⁸³ Acts 14:14-15.

⁸⁴ Acts 17:28.

Paul preached to a Jewish audience as an insider. Paul used key language that connected him to the audience, “men of Israel” and “our fathers,” and as the sermon developed he referred to the audience as “brothers”.⁸⁵ Because Paul was Jewish, it may have been far easier for Paul to identify the cultural narrative, articulate the shared story and preach in a way that would be culturally relevant. Yet, he was also effective with Gentiles. “While it is true that the speech’s theology is firmly rooted in the Old Testament and Judaism, Paul is able to convey biblical revelation in the language and categories of his Greek listeners-without traveling down the slippery slope towards syncretism.”⁸⁶

“Luke describes a mission that is willing and able to speak in a language that can be heard.”⁸⁷ The preacher is looking for language, grammar and even idioms that make sense to the culture. In some urban contexts, phrases such as “hood rich,” “making it” and “beating it down” have important meaning. A preacher with the appropriate relationship with the culture and the people can use these phrases to speak the cultural language of the people. The dialect and vernacular used by the preacher should match up with the congregation. For example, for a less educated culture, more simple and direct language would be advisable. Another interesting example comes from a campus in Dearborn, Michigan, where Ford Motors headquarters is located. The preacher should be versatile in speaking about automobiles and car shows. Through common language and grammar, an audience is more likely to connect with a preacher.

⁸⁵ Acts 13:16, 26.

⁸⁶ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 77.

⁸⁷ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *You will be My Witnesses: Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles*, *Missiology* 10 (1982): 423.

Illustrations

An important tool to help listeners understand what took place in the first century and see it in a modern context is through the use of culturally relevant illustrations. As preachers immerse themselves in a culture, they will see and hear things only an insider in that culture may be privy to. Jesus immersed himself into the Jewish agrarian culture where he identified farming, weeds and soil as examples of everyday life in the culture. When Jesus used these cultural illustrations, he tapped into his audience's pre-existing categories to help make the teaching more meaningful. Today's illustrations may come from local sports, business world, school, pop culture, literature, movies, and community events. As the preacher demonstrates cultural intelligence by articulating the cultural narrative of its views, hopes, dreams and fears as well as connecting with the audience through a shared story spoken in the familiar "languages" of the culture, he will also want to integrate cultural illustrations. Relevant illustrations evidence the preacher to be an insider who can be trusted as well as an effective teacher who can illustrate complex topics in simple ways.

Offer Possibilities

The final step in phase three of the contextualization rubric is to unveil how the functional gods of the culture can never achieve the people's aspiration but by offering other possibilities, only Christ offers them hope to reach their ultimate objectives. Yet, Keller warns that this is only done after the preacher sympathetically entered the new culture and has built strong bridges through understanding the cultural narrative, speaking a shared story between the preacher and the residents, use of relevant languages and cultural grammar as well as cultural illustrations.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 120.

We have already seen, in chapter two, how Paul did not dismiss the hopes of a culture. In Athens, he commended their religious pursuit as seen through the numerous idols of worship.⁸⁹ Following the affirmation, Paul confronted their limitations; what the Athenians worshiped as unknown, Paul could make known.⁹⁰ Keller explains the importance of this ordering, “Our criticism of the culture will have no power to persuade unless it is based on something that we can affirm in the beliefs and values of that culture.”⁹¹

Instead of immediately condemning a culture’s idolatry, first understand it. See its limits and how it will not ultimately achieve the goals they are desiring. Compassionately empathize with the cultural values and appreciate the frustrations in knowing that they will never ultimately achieve their hopes and dreams without Christ. With that humble compassion, reveal how Christ is the ultimate satisfaction they are unknowingly striving for as they pursue their cultural narrative. One of C.S. Lewis’ famous quotations helps bring clarity to this final step in the rubric: “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”⁹² God wants His creations made in His image to experience far greater than anything they can ask or imagine.⁹³ Preachers contextualize because they desire to help people understand and experience far greater with Christ than they could on their own.

⁸⁹ Acts 17:22-23.

⁹⁰ Acts 17:23.

⁹¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 124.

⁹² C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: Harper One, 1980), 26.

⁹³ Ephesians 3:20.

The approach of the contextualization rubric is far more than merely critiquing a culture's misguided pursuit of a hope in anything other than Christ. The goal is not to denounce their culture, but to see God redeem the people. It is more than identifying the problem and then offering Christ in some disconnected way. If possible, preachers contextualize their messages by identifying the cultural narrative; that is, articulate what the residents have given supreme value or made a false gospel. After building bridges of relationship strong enough to carry the gospel through a shared story, adapting to the cultural grammar and utilizing culturally relevant illustrations, preachers identify the reasons why the cultural goal will never be fully realized because of the absence of Christ. Finally, similar to how Paul showed the Athenians through their own poets that their religious pursuit would be in vain until they embraced Jesus as the unknown God they worshiped, preachers contextualize to reveal the possibility for the culture to ultimately achieve far greater desires of its cultural narrative only in and through the triune God. As Keller notes, "When we enter a culture with care, we earn the ability to speak to it. Then, after we challenge a culture's belief framework, our listeners will feel destabilized. Now, in this final stage of contextualization, we can reestablish equilibrium. Having confronted, we now console, showing them that what they are looking for can only be found in Christ. Put another way, we show our listeners that the plotlines of their lives can only find a resolution, a 'happy ending,' in Jesus. We must retell the culture's story in Jesus."⁹⁴ Before the preacher arrived, the culture was in a place of orientation. As the preacher identifies the limits and deficiencies of the cultural narrative, the residents move to a place of disorientation. As the preacher completes phase three of the contextualization rubric, he offers the fullest dreams of the cultural narrative through Scripture and the Gospel. When the listeners are given the grace to receive the contextualized message, they move to a place of new orientation.

⁹⁴ Keller, *Center Church*, 130.

What might this look like in practice? The cultural narrative may be to live for the joy in the moment, and experience everything that you can in this lifetime because after death there is nothing else. Therefore, do whatever makes you happy in the moment. The premise of this narrative is that this earthly life is all there is and no eternal life is possible. The underlying fear is death, for that would end enjoying a happy life. While the third spoke “Fall” of the rubric exposes the limitations of this cultural narrative, the “Restoration” spoke identifies the far greater possibilities in Christ.

This life is but a vapor compared to the eternal life with God that salvation through Christ offers. The fall and curse of sin will continually limit the joy this life has to offer. Sin guarantees that there will never be uninterrupted seasons of happiness. Yet, God does offer a time where there will be no more suffering and pain forevermore. In fact, everything on the bucket list does not have to be experienced on this side of heaven, for in the new heavens and earth there is an eternity to enjoy God and his redeemed creation. In fact, because eternal life is available, we are free to live with a different standard than doing whatever makes you happy in the moment. Instead, we can use this brief life to live for Christ; that is, leaving God’s will for this life will in fact produce the greatest and most long-term happiness.

Contextualized preaching assists a culture which is in a state of orientation move to disorientation through identifying its inability to achieve its goals; then, the preacher offers the people a new orientation. This new orientation is where they discover their cultural ambitions can be fully discovered only in Christ, but also the preacher shares God’s call for all people to repent and believe.⁹⁵ Asserts Keller, “Having entered a culture and challenged its idols, we should

⁹⁵ Mark 1:14-15.

follow the apostle Paul in presenting Christ to our listeners as the ultimate source of what they have been seeking.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

Unintentional contextualized interpretation, communication and application has plagued many preachers rendering their message far less relevant and meaningful. Moving from unintentional to intentional contextualized preaching may be waiting for a simple and practical tool easily adapted by preachers for themselves and their churches. The contextualization rubric presented above hopefully advances the conversation and search for a usable contextualization tool that honors the limited margin of time preachers have.

The rubric involves a three-step process. First step, the preacher identifies the key spokes to communicate Scripture and Gospel, and then places them on the rim. With the spokes identified, the preacher fleshes in the rubber tire section with key topic areas that he usually draws from to develop and deepen understanding of the key spokes. This initial phase will help the preacher have greater self-awareness, and also alignment with his church. If the preacher is a campus pastor in a multisite church, he most likely will have to align his spokes and key topics with the church’s spokes and topics.

The rubric’s second step is to keep the key spokes of God’s message, but to then exegete the culture. The preacher is looking for what the culture believes, hopes, fears or objects to about each of the spokes – God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Through this step, the preacher is gaining valuable cultural intelligence. Specifically, the information gathered is able to direct the preacher to the relevant spiritual topics the residents are interested in.

⁹⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 130.

The final step of the rubric is in keeping with the wheel analogy but changing the spokes in order to begin forming and writing a contextualized sermon. Beginning with the cultural narrative spoke, the preacher should be able to articulate the hopes and goals of the culture. This demonstrates that the preacher understands the people, he is also softly setting up his confrontation that will come later after bridges of connection are built. It is through shared story, common language and cultural illustrations that the preacher builds a bridge strong enough to identify the limits of their cultural narrative. The final spoke of the rim is overcoming in the inherent limits of the cultural narrative that is missing Christ with new possibilities that are only found in Scripture and the Gospel.

This simple rubric puts a usable tool in the hands of preachers to better contextualize their sermons. However, campus pastors in multisite churches may have far greater limits rendering the rubric powerless. If the DNA of the church is to be maintained at all campuses in order to remain as one church, the question is whether the lane that is formed by the church's DNA is broad enough to allow campus pastors to contextualize their sermons to their particular culture.

The author presented a portion of this material and the rubric to a team of preaching campus pastors. The presentation and the results are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEMINAR ON CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING IN A MULTISITE CONTEXT

The details of a seminar on the subject of Contextualized Preaching in a Multisite Context are presented in this chapter. The seminar is targeted toward preachers who serve a church that has Fourteen campuses in throughout Southeastern Michigan. The intended outcome is for seminar attendees to better appreciate the scriptural prescription for contextualized preaching; also, for the attendees to discover opportunities and freedoms within their multisite church to tailor the preaching to their particular cultural context.

The seminar was offered to the preaching team at Woodside Bible Church with thirty-five attendees. The seminar could also be offered at a Pastor's Conference, Seminary or Bible College. While it was primarily targeted to preachers in a multisite church, it could easily be adjusted to instruct preachers to be knowledgeable and sensitive to their cultures and adapt their messages utilizing the contextualization rubric.

This two-hour seminar set three goals: (1) present the problem of limited contextualized preaching in a multisite context, (2) present the biblical foundation for contextualized preaching, and (3) demonstrate the contextualization rubric. The aim is to equip preachers to be aware of the need to contextualize their preaching, and provide a rubric to assist them in developing contextualized sermon notes.

This chapter includes the outline for the seminar. Appendix A includes the seminar notes. The first two-thirds of the seminar is primarily lecture based while the final third is discussion based. A question and answer opportunity was provided at the transition of each key topic as well as at the end of the seminar.

Seminar Outline

Outcome: Seminar participants will examine Paul's three contextualized sermons from the book of Acts and explore the biblical prescription for sermon contextualization. A rubric for contextualization will be explained and participants will have opportunity to practice using the rubric.

Goals:

1. As a result of this seminar, multisite preachers will examine the apostle Paul's contextualized sermons to Antioch, Lystra and Athens.
2. As a result of this seminar, multisite preachers will be challenged to process whether Scripture obligates and prescribes the tailoring of messages to the cultural context.
3. As a result of this seminar, multisite preachers will explore the contextualization rubric and begin to apply it to their campus culture.

Overview:

- I. Introduction (10 minutes)
 - A. General agreement for contextualized preaching.
 - B. Define contextualized preaching.
 - C. Scripture supports contextualized preaching.
 - D. The continuum of contextualization: under-contextualizing to over-contextualization.
 - E. Contextualized preaching is inevitable and unfortunately unintentional.
- II. Identification of the Limits to Contextualized Preaching in a Multisite Context (10 minutes)
 - A. Contextualized preaching is challenging in a multisite church.
 - B. The "DNA" lane keeps a multi-campus church one church.
 - C. The "DNA" lane when too narrow can limit contextualized preaching.
 - D. Woodside Bible Church has multiple cultural narratives.
 - E. Question: Does the Woodside "DNA" limit or free-up preachers to contextualize?
- III. Laying a Biblical Foundation (40 minutes)
 - A. The incarnation of Jesus.
 1. The foundation of contextualization is seen in Jesus' incarnation.

2. Jesus used common language, cultural illustrations and cultural communication.
3. The incarnation of Jesus substantiates that contextualization is an obligation.

B. Paul's sermon to Antioch.

1. Primary and secondary audiences.
2. Review of the sermon.
3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.
4. Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.
5. Results of the contextualized sermon.

C. Paul's sermon to Lystra.

1. Primary audience.
2. Review of the sermon.
3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.
4. Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.
5. The sermon did not include mention of Jesus.
6. Results of the contextualized sermon.

D. Paul's sermon to Athens.

1. Primary audience.
2. Review of the sermon.
3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.
4. Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.
5. The sermon included mention of Jesus' resurrection but not his death.
6. Results of the contextualized sermon.

E. Evaluating Paul's sermons.

IV. Exploring the Contextualization Rubric (40 minutes)

- A. Introduction of the object illustration.
- B. The firm, inflexible "rim" components of Scripture and the Gospel.
- C. The flexible "rubber tire" topic areas of the five key spokes.
- D. The cultural content analysis within the five key spokes.
- E. Identification of the five key cultural spokes.
- F. The cultural content analysis within the five key cultural spokes.
- G. Participant use of the rubric for their context.

V. Question & Answer (20 minutes)

Teaching Notes:

I. Introduction

The seminar begins with a brief introduction of yourself, and the topics that will be covered. Explain that particular attention will be given to contextualized preaching in a multisite church context.

A. General agreement for contextualized preaching.

Today, there is a burgeoning recognition among Christians around the globe that in order for the Christian message to be meaningful to people it must come to them in language and categories that make sense with in their particular culture and life situation. It must be contextualized.¹

Describe the growing recognition of contextualized preaching over the past decades. Bring into focus of the general understanding of context sensitivity. For the Christian message to be meaningful to a group of people, the sermon should use that group's cultural grammar and categories.

B. Define contextualized preaching.

Contextualization has to do with a how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting.²

Scripture and the Gospel come to life when the audience and setting are given attention. There are several factors that influence a cultural narrative. As the preacher learns of these

¹ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 13.

² Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 13.

cultural factors and intentionally uses them when developing sermons, then Scripture is more meaningful to people.

C. Scripture supports contextualized preaching.

Although the term contextualization was quite recently minted, the activity of expressing and embodying the gospel in context-sensitive ways has characterized the Christian mission from the very beginning.³

The whole of Scripture bears witness to contextualizing God's Word to groups of people. Preachers adapted their messages based on the listeners' view of God, shared history, religious traditions and view of authority. God's Word was first written to communicate mostly with Jews, and then re-contextualized to communicate with Gentiles.

D. The continuum of contextualization: under-contextualizing to over-contextualization.

Contextualization rightly comes under attack when the values of culture are given authority more than Scripture. Several examples are provided, such as how churches have modified their theology to include the LGBTQ community. In addition, examples are provided to demonstrate under-contextualization; this presents Scripture in less meaningful ways to a particular gathering of people. When sermons are contextualized effectively, preachers can help people get the vision of Jesus and only Jesus providing ultimate fulfillment for their hopes and dreams.

E. Contextualized preaching is inevitable and unfortunately unintentional.

Every preacher is already a contextualized being. The preacher's experiences and influences have already molded them prior to entering the current context. Preachers

³ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 15.

contextualize in the interpretation of the text, communication of the message and in their application. Inevitably and unintentionally, preachers demand their congregation contextualize themselves to the preacher. Their culture-laden language as well as culturally irrelevant illustrations necessitate the congregation adapt to the preacher rather than the preacher sensitizing himself to the culture.

II. Identification of the Limits to Contextualized Preaching in a Multisite Context (10 minutes)

A. Contextualized preaching is challenging in a multisite church.

Multisite churches rely on being one church in many different locations. In order to be one church, there must be unity and alignment throughout the campuses despite being in culturally distinct areas. Each multisite church develops its “DNA” including vision, mission, strategy, values and philosophy of ministries. This DNA establishes the lane within which each campus must preach and minister. Generally, the founding campus established the DNA. This DNA was developed in light of the one campus that existed at the time; generally, the DNA was not designed with an eye toward all campuses.

B. The “DNA” lane keeps a multi-campus church one church.

Provided every campus adheres to the DNA of the church, then there will be continued unity and alignment between all the campuses. This alignment is essential to being one church.

C. The “DNA” lane when too narrow can limit contextualized preaching.

Depending on the ingredients of the DNA and the DNA for preaching at campuses, the DNA lane may be too narrow to effectively contextualize sermons. Video based campuses where the sermon is one preacher at the founding campus, discover it is likelier that contextualization is limited to the campus congregation being preached to. Yet, even live preaching at campuses may be restrictive depending on the DNA for sermon writing and sermon delivery at each campus.

D. Woodside Bible Church has multiple cultural narratives.

Multicultural but predominately white congregations exist at most Woodside campuses including Troy,⁴ Lake Orion,⁵ White Lake,⁶ Plymouth,⁷ Chesterfield Township⁸ and Farmington Hills.⁹ A greater socio-economic disparity as well as the congregation being predominately African-American attend at Pontiac,¹⁰ Warren¹¹ and Detroit¹² campuses. Varying degrees of rural congregations are identified in Lapeer,¹³ Romeo¹⁴ and Algonac.¹⁵ Royal Oak¹⁶ campus has a high

⁴ "City of Troy, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 14, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>.

⁵ "Lake Orion, American Fact Finder," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 16, 2016, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk.

⁶ "Charter Township of White Lake, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/2612586860,2680700,00>.

⁷ "City of Plymouth, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/HSG030210/26>.

⁸ "Chesterfield Township City Data," City-Data.com, n.d., accessed January 17, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/township/Chesterfield-Macomb-MI.html>.

⁹ "City of Farmington Hills, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2627440>.

¹⁰ "City of Pontiac, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/2665440>.

¹¹ "City of Warren, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2684000>.

¹² "City of Detroit, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 14, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/IPE120214/2622000>.

¹³ "City of Lapeer, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/26087>.

¹⁴ "City of Romeo, U.S. Census," Census Reporter, n.d., accessed October 14, 2016, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US2669400-romeo-mi/>.

¹⁵ "City of Algonac, American Fact Finder," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 11, 2016, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk.

¹⁶ "City of Royal Oak, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045213/2670040/embed/accessible>.

concentration of millennials. Dearborn¹⁷ campus is located in a geographic area that is predominantly Arabic-Muslim. Open the conversation up to allow pastors to discuss the cultural nuance of their community.

E. Question: Does the Woodside “DNA” limit or free-up preachers to contextualize?

In light of the cultural differences, the question is posed whether the Woodside DNA creates a broad enough lane that equips and permits the campus pastors to tailor their sermons in a context-sensitive way that brings meaningful messages. Set aside time to allow pastors to share their opinions.

III. Laying a Biblical Foundation (40 minutes)

A. The incarnation of Jesus.

The Son of God who has existed for all eternity voluntarily stepped off the throne of glory for a time to come to earth in order to become both God and man.

1. The foundation of contextualization is seen in Jesus’ incarnation.

Jesus coming to earth and living among humans may be the greatest argument for contextualization. Jesus took on the likeness of man. Specifically, he was born to specific parents, he was a Palestinian Jew, born and raised in the Jewish culture, and his language was Aramaic with a Galilean accent. Jesus was contextualized to the degree that many never even realized that he came from somewhere else.¹⁸

¹⁷ Exploring Dearborn, Michigan: Home To A Growing Muslim American Community," WXYZ Detroit, September 29, 2016, accessed November 14, 2016, <http://www.wxyz.com/muslim-american/exploring-dearborn-michigan-home-to-a-growing-muslim-american-community>.

¹⁸ Charles H. Kraft and Marguerite G. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 175.

2. Jesus used common language, cultural illustrations and cultural communication.

Because Jesus immersed himself in the culture, he was able to use the common language and cultural traditions to communicate God's truth in a more meaningful way. His teaching was filled with everyday illustrations that connected with the locals including: fishing, farming, weeds and soil. Further, Jesus was seen as adapting his speeches to the listener: Differences in what and how Jesus communicated is seen in comparing the rich young ruler, the woman at the well, Nicodemus and Peter.¹⁹

3. The incarnation of Jesus makes contextualization an obligation.

Dean Flemming an expert and published author contends that Jesus' incarnation makes contextualized preaching an obligation.²⁰ Flemming concludes for a number of reasons: (1) Jesus himself was contextualized in the Jewish culture, (2) Jesus taught using the cultural language with relevant illustrations, and (3) Jesus' sermons and speeches were contextualized to the listener.²¹

B. Paul's sermon to Antioch.

The Holy Spirit laid a foundation in the Book of Acts for contextualization. Peter did not intentionally set out to preach contextually to people from various languages. The Holy Spirit took what Peter said and culturally nuanced it in their personal language. In addition, the remainder of the Book of Acts makes a strong case, especially through Paul's sermons, for contextualized preaching.

¹⁹ Matthew 19:16-26; John 3:1-15; 4:1-45; Mark 8:31-38.

²⁰ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 21.

²¹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 21.

1. Primary and secondary audiences.

In Antioch, Acts chapter 13, the primary audience Paul preached to was Jews in a synagogue. In addition, there were Gentile converts as well as God-fearers. God-fearers had turned from polytheism to monotheism, and they aligned with the Jews in imageless worship, observance of the Sabbath, compliance with the dietary laws.²² Yet, the God-fearers had not denied the ungodly aspects of their culture. If they had, they would have been cut off from family and friends. In effect, they were living a double life.²³

2. Review of the sermon.

Paul began with the shared history he had with the predominately Jewish audience. The history dated back to Egyptian slavery. From there, Paul pointed them to the prophet Samuel, then king Saul and king David. The lineage of David ultimately revealed the Savior Jesus. Even John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus. Because Jerusalem Jews did not recognize Jesus as Savior, they crucified him. Yet, God raised Jesus from death to life. Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The sermon in Acts 13 is a model sermon for Paul preaching to Jews in synagogues.²⁴

3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.

Paul spoke as an insider. He did not present himself as an outsider to the Jews in Antioch, but rather created common ground between him and them. Since the Jews and Paul agreed on the authority of Scripture, he used Scripture and relied on it as authoritative. He addressed the congregation in a way that connected them with Paul; for example, he said, "our fathers" and

²² Jay E. Adams, *Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 12.

²³ Adams, *Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul*, 13.

²⁴ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 57.

“brothers”. Even the structure of the sermon Paul delivered would have been in a format that the listeners were accustomed.²⁵

4. Paul’s contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.

Paul did not shy away from sharing how the Jerusalem Jews had executed Jesus despite being the fulfillment of the prophesied Messiah. Throughout the message he connected with the Gentiles by referring to them as well as using Greek speaking techniques.²⁶ He methodically and intentionally moved the listeners toward the heart of his message which was the Gospel.

5. Results of the contextualized sermon.

Some in attendance begged Paul to return the following week to preach again. Following the sermon, many people waited to have personal discussions with Paul. There were some conversions to Christianity, and the response was sufficient to plant a church.

C. Paul’s sermon to Lystra.

This is the second of three sermons Paul shared in Acts.

1. Primary audience.

The audience in Lystra was primarily uneducated pagans. They were known to be primitive rustics who believed in traditional Greek religion.²⁷ They were far from being God-

²⁵ Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 407.

²⁶ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 16.

²⁷ Dean P. Béchar, "Paul Among the Rustics: The Lystran Episode (Acts 14:8-20) and Lucan Apologetic," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2001): 84-101.

fearers. There is no evidence of any influence of Jewish scripture or Greek philosophy.²⁸ They were polytheistic.

2. Review of the sermon.

In Acts chapter 14, Paul preached in the streets as there was no synagogue. During this preaching, God worked through Paul to heal a crippled man. The Lycaonians saw the divine power of healing and were determined to worship Paul and Barnabas believing they were Hermes and Zeus. There were local stories of a previous visit of Zeus and Hermes.²⁹ Paul was able to stop them from worshipping them. Then, Paul preached an abbreviated sermon to this pagan crowd. Paul focused his preaching on monotheism. He pointed them to the One Creator who made the heavens and earth. This One God was for all nations rather than just another national deity. Further, the Creator's goodness could be seen through the rains He sent that produced their crops.

3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.

Paul identified common ground with the Lycaonians by explaining how they shared the same nature and same humanity. Paul used a Greek sermon structure that they would have been accustomed.³⁰ Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.

4. Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.

Paul did not value their strong sense of culture over Scriptures. He addressed them as "men" rather than "brothers." He immediately moved to correct their theological errors in order

²⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts of the Apostles*. In *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9:436.

²⁹ Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 67-68.

³⁰ Marianne Fournier, *The Episode at Lystra: A Rhetorical and Semiotic Analysis of Acts 14:7-20a* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 193.

to stop them from making a sacrifice to them. Paul pointed them to One God and exhorted them to turn away from the vain idols. However, Paul did not specifically declare Jesus.

5. The sermon did not include mention of Jesus.

Paul's starting point was different than in Antioch. He could not begin with Scripture or even a monotheistic view of God. The goal of the first message was to point them to a monotheistic God and away from vain idols. Later, after Paul was stoned nearly to death, it identifies some from Lystra as disciples. In order to be disciples, Paul must have shared Christ with them for their salvation at some time following the first sermon.

6. Results of the contextualized sermon.

Paul's sermon successfully stopped the people from worshiping them in sacrifice. One unfortunate response was that Jews traveled from more than 100 miles away to stone Paul. In response to the stoning, "disciples" helped Paul. These disciples appear to be believers from Lystra. It is also believed that the disciples from Lystra included Timothy, his mother and grandmother.³¹ Further, the Lord had "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."³²

D. Paul's sermon to Athens.

In Acts chapter 17, Paul shared his message with Athenian's in the synagogue and market place as well as the philosophers. Ultimately, Paul was able to preach to the highly regarded Athenian senate.

³¹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2117.

³² Acts 14:27.

1. Primary audience.

The primary audience was Greek educated polytheistic pagans. The philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans had become the religion of the day.³³ While in Athens, Paul preached in the synagogue, the marketplace and finally in the Areopagus.

2. Review of the sermon.

In Acts chapter 17, philosophers overheard Paul evangelizing in the marketplace, and they believed he was introducing new and strange gods. The philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus for the Athenian Senate to decide whether Paul was in violation of the law for introducing new gods. Socrates had been condemned 400 years before under similar charges. Paul argued that he was not introducing new gods, but instead he declared the God whom they already worshiped but did not know who it was. Paul interpreted Greek poetry as only being able to find its ultimate fulfillment in the One True God.³⁴ The God Paul declared was Jesus whom God raised from the dead. Paul challenged them to repent of their polytheistic idolatry, and turn to God through Christ. Paul's focus was on Jesus' resurrection, not including a focus on Jesus' death.

3. Paul's intentional efforts to contextualize the sermon.

Despite being agitated by the idolatry and disrespected when they called him a "babbler," Paul was a model of courtesy.³⁵ His control of emotions allowed him to be a Greek to the Greeks. In a masterful introduction, Paul commended their religion. He declared the truth of God and Jesus in the context of their religious idols.

³³ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 26.

³⁴ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 33.

³⁵ Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Character of Paul* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927), 190.

Paul created dissonance in the Greek listeners by exposing their ignorance of the identity of the unknown god they worshiped. In doing this, Paul evaded the charge of introducing new gods because the God Paul spoke of was culturally relevant. As Paul did with pagans in Lystra, he created common ground by pointing them to general revelation.

The exceptional demonstration of contextualization was how Paul used Greek poetry. In using the poetry, Paul showed personal familiarity with the Greek culture.³⁶ The poets had become the then modern day religious authorities.³⁷ Paul's interpretation of the poetry was that ultimate fulfillment could only be found in Jesus. The genius was that Paul used the Greek ideas and language to transform their worldview.

4. Paul's contextualization did not result in compromising Scripture.

Paul reinterpreted "we are God's offspring" often quoted by the poets not in the Stoic pantheistic sense, but rather in a biblical sense of being created in the image of God.³⁸ The platform for Paul's critique of pagan idolatry was that if the living God made them in His image, then they could not create gods out of lifeless objects. The only ultimately fulfillment is in knowing the Risen One rather than seeking gods in a philosophical quest exploring nature.

5. The sermon included mention of Jesus' resurrection but not his death.

While Paul declared Jesus' resurrection, he did not specifically mention Jesus' death. There was a focus on the coming judgment for any who did not place their faith in Jesus. The proof of this future judgment was that Jesus was raised from the dead. The focus on the

³⁶ C. H. Reiu, *The Acts of the Apostles by St. Luke* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1957), 152.

³⁷ Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way to Western Civilization* (New York: the New American Library, 1951), 159.

³⁸ Adams, *Audience Adaptations*, 33.

resurrection rather than the death is logical in light of why Paul was originally brought before the Areopagus.³⁹

6. Results of the contextualized sermon.

Paul was not condemned by the Areopagus for introducing new gods as was Socrates 400 years earlier. In response, some people desired to hear Paul teach again. Some were granted faith unto salvation, and some mocked and laughed and Paul.

E. Evaluating Paul's sermons.

Content and delivery of sermons were decided by Paul in light of the audience and occasion. He did not use a singular sermon approach for all gatherings; each sermon was contextualized to the listeners. Paul's sermons are more than a description they are prescription for preachers today.

IV. Exploring the Contextualization Rubric (40 minutes)

Upon review the literature for contextualization, only the beginnings of a practical rubric was found to help preachers contextualize.⁴⁰ The goal of this paper was to hopefully discover a tool that might offer some use to preachers who desire to contextualize and especially for multisite preachers.

A. Introduction of the object illustration.

Tires on vehicles have two primary components: (1) the rim which is firm and inflexible, and (2) the rubber tire which can contour to different terrains.⁴¹

³⁹ Acts 17:18-20.

⁴⁰ Jackson Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 88-89.

⁴¹ Wu, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 89.

B. The firm, inflexible “rim” components of Scripture and the Gospel.

When contextualizing preaching, it is essential to identify what one is unwilling to compromise. The rim of the tire which is firm and inflexible represents the uncompromising truth of Scripture and the Gospel. Five key spokes of God’s message potentially include: God, creation, fall, redemption and restoration. The number and type of key spoke components can be increased or reduced depending on how the church or preacher communicate the key components of God’s message. For example, an alternative is four key spokes: who is God, how did God operate in the past, how does God operate today, and how will God operate in the future. The rim while inflexible can flex for the number and description of key spokes.

C. The flexible “rubber tire” topic areas of the five key spokes.

From the key spoke areas represented by the rim, the rubber tire has five key sections. Each of the five sections is an extension of one spoke of the rim. The God spoke of the rim extends into the rubber tire which includes several Bible topics that could be taught to bring clarity to who God is. These topics could include areas such as monotheism, the trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The rubber tire is to contour to the different cultures. The preacher would pick certain topics from the rubber area that would make the teaching most meaningful to the culture.

D. The cultural content analysis within the five key spokes.

The second phase of the contextualization rubric is to retain the five key spokes of the Scripture and Gospel, and to place cultural topics in the rubber tire section related to the spoke. For example, for the God spoke various cultural topics include polytheism, idolatry, atheism and agnosticism. Instead of preachers dedicating themselves to becoming cultural experts, this rubric allows the Scripture and Gospel to be the one message preachers communicate and culture is evaluated through the lens of the key spokes of God’s message.

E. Identification of the five key cultural spokes.

The third phase of using the contextualization rubric is to use the tire not for the Scripture and Gospel spokes but for cultural analysis. After reviewing the literature on contextualization, the five spoke cultural spokes include: cultural narrative, shared story, language, illustrations and identifying limits and offer possibilities.

F. The cultural content analysis within the five key cultural spokes.

These five cultural keys appear to closely align with Paul's cultural analysis as well as reflect key areas identified in cultural adaptation. For the rim spoke of cultural narratives, the key topic areas in the rubber tire section might include: hopes, fears, beliefs and objections. It would also include worldviews.

The shared story is the second cultural key. Within the rubber tire section, topics would include awareness of the Bible, identity of who or what has authority, and different religious backgrounds. The third cultural key is language. Topics could include languages spoken by the audience or cultural-laden terminology. Illustrations are the fourth cultural key. Paul used Greek poetry and rain producing crops. Jesus used soil, seed, wineskins and others. Today, it may be binging on Netflix or podcasts. The final cultural key is identifying limits within the cultural narrative; that is, people desire to reach X, yet they can never reach X. The Athenians worshiped an alter to an unknown God. The second half of the final cultural key is offering possibilities. While the culture cannot reach their goal based on their objects of affection, they could discover X through Jesus and the Gospel. Just as Paul unveiled to the Areopagus that the truth the poets spoke of could only ultimately discovered in Christ, this final cultural key is helping a culture realize that their culture's worldview can only be ultimately achieved through Scripture and the Gospel.

G. Participant use of the rubric for their context.

Seminar attendees are given time to work through the three phase contextualization rubric with their current culture in mind.

V. Question & Answer (20 minutes)

This time for questions and answers is important for attendees to ask clarifying questions as well as working questions in using the contextualization rubric.

Evaluation of the Seminar

The seminar presented in this chapter was shared with a group of thirty-five pastors and preaching team members at Woodside Bible Church in Troy, Michigan on January 17, 2017. There were approximately twelve campus pastors, twelve ministry leaders and the remainder were lay preaching team members. Each attendee belongs to a campus with a cultural narrative. Each participant expressed appreciation for the material.

All in attendance shared how they learned much from Paul's detailed contextualized approach. The breakdown of his specific efforts to contextualize in light of the uniqueness of each audience was new or a healthy refresher. Also, the contextualization rubric was something they had never thought about or seen anything like. Half of the participants encouraged that we spend far more time on the topic of contextualized preaching.

Following the presentation, eight surveys were completed through one-on-one interviews. All but two of the interviewees were campus pastors. The other interviewees were an associate campus pastor and a multisite leader. The survey-interview was to spend time with those in

attendance who continuously think about how to preach in the most meaningful way to their congregation.

Urban Culture

One of the Fourteen Woodside campuses is predominately urban, African American with significant poverty.⁴² Lorenzo Sewell, the campus pastor of Woodside Pontiac, Michigan was interviewed on January 23, 2017 for thirty minutes using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Lorenzo leads more than 500 people who are primarily African American and poor. In Pontiac, Michigan, the schools have received failing grades for three straight years, and the schools may be shut down at any time. The living conditions for 2,000 people in walking distance is terrible; the low-income housing complexes are filled with bed bugs, sewer flies, roaches and mold.

Lorenzo affirmed the inflexible rim and the flexible rubber tire illustration. He also agreed with the five key spokes of Scripture and Gospel. As we discussed the first phase of the contextualization rubric, Lorenzo identified several areas where urban churches have historically taught incorrect theology. People who have been taught word of faith theology believe they have the ability to create; in fact, they can speak things into existence like a creator. He observed that there is also much defective theology in the Black culture surrounding baptism. Lorenzo explained that some people believe baptism is how one's sins are literally washed away; other people believe that a second baptism of the Spirit must take place with speaking in tongues being manifested to affirm salvation.

⁴² "City of Pontiac, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/2665440>.

Cultural adaptation in Pontiac, Michigan requires Lorenzo to have “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand.” He must touch on what is in the news. Current events such as using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B is the possible shutting down of the Pontiac schools must be discussed. Lorenzo believes that Woodside does provide sufficient freedom only because he sees effort to bring ten urban churches and ten suburban churches together for racial reconciliation as well as the seminar presentation opening the conversation to further discuss cultural uniqueness. He recognizes the extreme difference of cultural context in Pontiac, Michigan compared to the other campuses, and this has given him concern. Recently, he stated that he is noticing specific efforts within Woodside to better appreciate urban, African American culture.

The associate pastor at Woodside Pontiac, Michigan is Ryan Russel. Ryan was interviewed on January 23, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. While Lorenzo is primarily focused on vision and people, Ryan concentrates his time on strategy and management. He affirmed the tire illustration noting that he appreciated how Scripture was protected with the inflexible rim. Likewise, he supported the five spoke statements representing Scripture and Gospel.

Ryan’s insight in phase two and three of the contextualization rubric was especially helpful. Ryan added an extra spoke called response which follows redemption. In this response spoke, Ryan sees the African American culture highly valuing spiritual gifts. Since there is not much material wealth, the spiritual gifts have important value. In fact, those who manifest spiritual gifts often struggle with pride because of the extra value they assign to them as well as other church attenders. In discussing phase three of the rubric, he explained the cultural narrative in distinct and helpful ways. People look to others who are “making it” and look to the “hood rich.” This is the young guy who has \$600 in his pocket and wears Air Jordan shoes. He has the appearance of riches, and other people see this person as successful with authority to influence

their lives. When it comes to a shared story, the preacher will need to share the heartbreak and pain in his personal life. While the stories of pain may look differently, it is imperative for preachers to intentionally connect their pain with the audiences' pain.

Ryan affirmed the freedoms to contextualize within Woodside's model. He consistently pointed out that contextualization is dependent on relational connection. The preacher must be relationally connected with the people to not only understand the people, but for the people to understand the preacher.

Multicultural, Higher Middle Class

Jeremy Writebol, the campus pastor of Woodside Plymouth, Michigan was interviewed on January 24, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Jeremy leads a campus of more than 250 people who are predominantly white and middle class; however, the broader community is a growing multicultural area.⁴³

Jeremy affirmed the tire illustration because he saw the value in both the rim for its inflexibility and the uncompromising nature of Scripture as well as the flexible rubber tire for its ability to contour to the nuanced cultural roads. The spokes were likewise affirmed; Jeremy shared how every culture and every story has the same five core elements. Question four of the survey focuses on phase two of the rubric, and this is where Jeremy's insight was especially helpful and affirming. He spoke of the functional gods he sees in the culture being gods of affluence, success, family and security. These are the pursuits of life. Jeremy was then able under question five, phase three of the rubric, to identify the limits of the functional gods and share how

⁴³ "City of Plymouth, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/HSG030210/26>.

they do not provide ultimate fulfillment. The gods of affluence, success, family and security are not bad in and of themselves, but only in Christ can one can find the greatest fulfillment.

Jeremy agreed that contextualized preaching is essential. He did note some limits to contextualization he saw with Woodside's sermon model. Woodside scripts the sermons for all campus pastors; however, the church only requires use of the passage, big idea and points. Everything else can be rewritten and adapted. Jeremy believes that the wording of the points can create an obstacle. For example, one recent point was "choose your investment." This may not connect with a poorer culture such as the Pontiac campus where 80% of the attendees have never had any financial "investments." The requirement of those few sentences is only a small concern as Jeremy experiences extensive freedom to contextualize.

Jeff Wallace is Woodside's scholarly research assistant who works on the multisite team. Jeff attends and is a key leader at the Farmington Hills, Michigan campus which is multicultural as well as people in a higher socio-economic status.⁴⁴ Jeff was interviewed on January 24, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B.

The tire illustration received Jeff's approval especially considering its ability to flex on the spokes of the rim as well as the topic areas of the rubber tire. For the rim, Jeff offered alternative categories for the spokes; God's existence, how God operated in the past (creation/fall), how God operates now (redemption) and how God will operate in the future (restoration). Interestingly, Jeff was the only interviewee out of the eight that suggested to change the rim. He had a solid handle on these spokes and was able to flesh them out well.

The comments Jeff provided under question six, were especially helpful and affirming. He shared how teachers bring "baggage to the text." Every communicator must be self-aware of

⁴⁴ "City of Farmington Hills, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2627440>.

how they have been contextualized themselves. He affirmed the rubric in how it helps the pastor to understand themselves, so that with great self-awareness they would be aware of their limits of contextualization. Jeff also affirmed Woodside's model for its maximum freedom allowing campus pastors to contextualize the sermons.

Arabic Muslim

Dave Carlson, the campus pastor of Woodside Dearborn, Michigan was interviewed on January 24, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Dave leads a campus just under 100 people who are predominantly white millennials. The broader community is quite different. Dearborn is the largest concentration of Arabic Muslims outside of the Middle East. In fact, more than 60% of the Dearborn population is Arabic Muslim.⁴⁵ For two years prior to becoming the campus pastor, Dave was a Woodside missionary to the Dearborn community. God provided a Dearborn church who reached out to Woodside to merge. Understanding that evangelism to Muslims is a long-term strategy, Woodside's campus model in Dearborn is comparable to other campuses. That is, Dave is building a campus primarily focusing on the other 40% of Dearborn; yet, the contextualized strategy for this campus is the missional outreach to Arabic Muslims. While that outreach is an essential element of the campus, it does not limit the vision of the campus.

The rim, Dave explained, carries the rubber tire. His primary concern was over-contextualization; the Gospel is "inherently revolting to certain cultures." The warning was to ensure that the contour of the road did not bend the rim. In light of Dave's Muslim culture, his concerns and warnings are understandable. Due to the high percentage of millennials in his

⁴⁵ Exploring Dearborn, Michigan: Home To A Growing Muslim American Community," WXYZ Detroit, September 29, 2016, accessed November 14, 2016, <http://www.wxyz.com/muslim-american/exploring-dearborn-michigan-home-to-a-growing-muslim-american-community>.

campus, it was interesting to hear how Dave offered two answers to every question – one answer for the millennials and the second answer for the middle-aged. Woodside’s sermon model was affirmed by Dave in that cultural contextualization could fit in the illustration and application sections of the sermon notes. Also, the minor inflexibility of the model was addressed in allowing campus pastors several “one-off sermons” where they choose the text and write their own sermon notes.

Multicultural, Lower Middle Class

Jeff Keith, the campus pastor of Woodside Warren, Michigan was interviewed on January 25, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Jeff leads a campus of more than 600 people. The cross-section of this multicultural city is better represented in the Warren campus than in a few other campuses.⁴⁶

Jeff explained that the tire illustration was “spot on.” The conversation centered on the core of the rim being the Bible. This was essential for Jeff. He explained that as the center of the rim changed, then the spokes would change and in turn the rubber tire section would flesh in differently. For example, if the Koran was placed at the center of the rim, then the entire tire would look differently. Jeff’s discussion under question five was particularly interesting as he demonstrated a solid grasp of the functional gods of the community. One example was how the family has become a god for people. He was able to identify its limits as well as how Christ overcomes those limits and people could find the answer to their underlying hopes and resolution to their hidden fears.

Question 7 is the catchall for anything else the interviewee desired to talk about. Jeff offered a helpful thought. His recommendation was to evaluate the sermons regularly to see if the

⁴⁶ “City of Warren, Michigan Quick Facts,” U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 13, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2684000>.

preacher over-relied on one or just a few of the spokes. He believes that our current culture of preaching is too heavily focused on the redemption spoke resulting in under-emphasizing the other spokes.

Millennial

Tim Holdridge, the campus pastor of Woodside Detroit, Michigan was interviewed on January 24, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Tim leads a campus of more than 300 people who are predominately millennials. The campus also has a great percentage of African Americans compared to other campuses. In Midtown Detroit, there is significant investment into the community most notably the new Red Wings hockey stadium. This is a college and young professional area of Detroit.⁴⁷

Tim agreed that the tire illustration helped explain the uncompromising theology in the rim and the application of that theology in the rubber sections that could be flexible for unique cultures. He also concurred with the five spokes for Scripture and Gospel. In discussing the second phase of the contextualization rubric, Tim explained that within his culture, people place excessive emphasis on honoring pastors. This can skew people's perception of who God is. Considering the sin and fall, Tim shared how more time is needed to help people take responsibility for their own sin rather than point at others to take responsibility.

It is important that Tim share in the story of the people of Detroit. As phase three of the contextualization rubric was discussed, Tim took considerable time to discuss the current events and historical events of Detroit. It is through his sharing of these events that he builds common ground in a shared story. He illustrated with stories of the mayor of Detroit, the riots of 1967 and

⁴⁷ "City of Detroit, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 14, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/IPE120214/2622000>.

how the city voted and reacted to the election results. Tim appreciates Woodside's model for preaching because he is given freedom to take good research and bring context sensitivity. While the Woodside DNA for preaching requires the campus pastor to use the big idea and points, Tim recommends that a different group who has marketing savvy be given permission to modify the final big idea. This one change would improve contextualization.

Jon Morales, the campus pastor of Woodside Royal Oak, Michigan was interviewed on January 24, 2017 for one hour using the 7 question survey attached in Appendix B. Jon leads a campus of more than 650 people who are predominately millennials.⁴⁸

Jon believed the tire illustration to be effective for the gospel and application of the gospel. He appreciated that the rim represented the uncompromising commitment to God's Word while the rubber allowed for flexibility for cultural adaptation. Likewise, he concurred with the five spokes as presented in the seminar. When asked about laying out the key topic areas for the rubber section for each spoke, Jon wrote, "The entire Word of God is application to all contexts and cultures. So, it doesn't matter where we're preaching from, that text will be relevant to any culture." Rather than focusing on choosing the appropriate text for initial cultural contextualization, Jon explained that any text that was preached could be culturally appropriate because it is God's Word. Jon was the only pastor interviewed who concluded such. During the third phase of the contextualization rubric, Jon demonstrated the ability to identify the limits of the cultural narrative to offer the gospel answer that what the culture was truly striving for could only be found in Christ.

Jon reiterated that contextualization is inevitable. So, it is important that we learn to contextualize intentionally and effectively. He believes that Woodside's model allows sufficient

⁴⁸ "City of Royal Oak, Michigan Quick Facts," U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045213/2670040/embed/accessible>.

freedom to contextualize. The only limit he identified was if a campus was going through a unique time, and the message series for all campuses was not on point. His encouragement was for preachers to continue deepening their cultural awareness, for that will lead to more effective contextualization of God's Word.

Conclusion

There was common appreciation and acceptance of the tire as a helpful illustration for the contextualization rubric. All interviewees engaged the rubric and worked through the three-phase process for their cultural narrative. It appeared that those surveyed found the rubric easy to use as well as helpful to contextualize their preaching.

What stood out is how most in attendance for the presentation and those interviewed do not regularly think about cultural nuance in a significant way that shapes their sermons. Most conceded to unintentionally contextualizing their sermons meaning by inviting the congregation to contextualize itself to the preacher. Yet, their desire was to continue to think more deeply about being far more culturally adaptive.

As it related to preaching in a multisite context, most of the preachers were confident that Woodside's preaching framework allotted them ample freedom to contextualize. However, this conclusion came from those who desire and justifiably need greater time to think about their cultural context. They appreciated the wide lane as it relates to preaching wherein there is a sermon script each week, but the preaching pastor is held only to sharing the scripture passage, big idea and main points. While the preacher could stay close to the notes, they also are afforded opportunity to re-write the explain, illustrate and apply sections. This freedom has appeased the campus pastors.

The universal feedback was great appreciation for studying and sharing on a topic that could be immediately useable. In addition, it appeared that the rubric could stand on its own as a tool that would offer help to many preachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Interpreting the Bible, preparing sermons and communicating God's Word is the preacher's work. Contextualization is intertwined in each step of the preacher's assignment. The preacher's essential task is to communicate Scripture in a way that is faithful to the original meaning of the text; a biblical text cannot mean more than it did to the original hearers. Before finalizing the thoughts of this thesis on the opportunities and challenges of contextualizing sermons, there is a biblical truth that should be made explicit – preachers preach because God commanded them to be His spokespersons to every nation, to all cultures, to all peoples and in every language.

The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, charged his Lycaonian disciple Timothy to “preach the word.”¹ “Preach” is from κηρύσσω (*kērusso*) which means to herald, to proclaim publicly; it is always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed.²

Al Mohler states,

The primary Greek form of the word “preach” (*kērusso*) reveals its intrinsic rootage in the *kerygma*—the gospel itself. Preaching is an inescapably theological act, for the preacher dares to speak of God and, in a very real sense, *for* God.³

Paul's charge to Timothy and all preachers is that communicating God's Word is a solemn responsibility and it is far too important to allow human weaknesses the power to

¹ 2 Timothy 4:2.

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 543.

³ R. Albert Mohler, “Preacher: Do you Have a Theology of Preaching”, in *The Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, Michael Duduit ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman And Holman Press, 1992), 13-20.

discourage.⁴ Thus, preaching springs from the truth that God has spoken in word and deed, and He has chosen human vessels to bear witness to Himself and His gospel. We speak because God has spoken.⁵ J. I. Packer defined preaching as “the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from Himself through the words of a spokesperson.”⁶ Charles Spurgeon believed in the importance of preaching, “Life, death, hell, and worlds unknown may hang on the preaching and hearing of a sermon.”⁷

The preacher’s assignment to communicate the Bible’s originally intended meaning is of great significance while also being beyond human ability.

Mohler goes on to state that

In preaching, finite, frail, and fault-ridden human beings bear bold witness to the infinite, all-powerful, and perfect Lord. Such an endeavor would smack of unmitigated arrogance and over-reaching were it not for the fact that God Himself has set us to the task. In this light, preaching is not an act of arrogance, but of humility. True preaching is not an exhibition of the brilliance or intellect of the preacher, but an exposition of the wisdom and power of God.⁸

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul contrasted human wisdom from spiritual wisdom.

Preaching is not dependent on human wisdom, but rather what the world would refer to as foolishness. Communication on behalf of God is not tied to the eloquence or persuasiveness of the human preacher. Rather, God-centered preaching is founded upon a demonstration of God’s power and the Holy Spirit.⁹ While Augustine is correct that God commands the impossible yet

⁴ 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

⁵ Mohler, *Preacher: Do you Have a Theology of Preaching*, 15.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Authority in Preaching: The Gospel in the Modern World* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1979), x.

⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit 39* (London: Alabaster and Passmore, 1893), 170.

⁸ Mohler, *Preacher: Do you Have a Theology of Preaching*, 17.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2.

provides the grace needed to obey the impossible commands, relying on the Spirit to faithfully accomplish the preacher's assignment continues to be subject to the frailty of the human condition.

In their desire to discover the original meaning of a biblical text knowing that it cannot mean more than it did to the original hearers, preachers, at times, over-confidently presume they have a pure, culture-free theology. Unfortunately, no a-cultural theology exists. Interpreting God's Word is subject to culture-laden, fallible preachers. It is impossible for any preacher to approach Scripture assumption-free or experience-free. A preacher's lens with which they read the Bible has many filters. Their ability to read and interpret the Bible is influenced by their primary cultural influences as well as numerous subcultures including family, career, politics, education and church. Further, they stand in time with thousands of years of church history. Since they do not live in the same culture as the biblical authors and have these additional cultural filters, their understanding and interpretation of the Word inevitably will be contextualized. A preacher's understanding and interpretation of Scripture is limited, much of the time unknowingly, by how their hermeneutic has already been contextualized. A commitment to intentional contextualization will help preachers become more aware of how their understanding and interpretation of Scripture has been too limited to effectively prepare and deliver sermons to their particular culture. A preacher's commitment to gaining cultural intelligence for maximizing meaningfulness of sermons will disciple the preacher in the words, works and ways of contextualized preachers of the Bible.

The multisite church has the potential to magnify the problem of under-contextualization. One church in many locations can be a license for sameness. If the desire is for identical interpretation, sermon preparation and delivery of God's Word regardless of each campus' unique and rich culture, then multisite churches will augment under-contextualization. Simultaneously, the multisite church is positioned to discover new heights of effective contextualization. One

church, one leadership exploring many distinct cultures at the same time through their campuses may offer greater leadership experimentation and collaboration than enjoyed at one campus churches. Imagine a group of campus pastors who have been coached and resourced to discern their specific cultural narrative, the objects of worship, worldviews, beliefs and fears. As these pastors share their cultural findings with one another, the team more accurately will understand the varied cultural landscape within which they minister. As a culturally informed leadership community, campus pastors working together with the same messages tailor the sermons more effectively using their shared story, cultural grammar and relevant illustrations, so that they can present Christ as the only possibility for ultimate satisfaction. This group of like-minded campus pastors, if held accountable to representing one church yet afforded freedom to contextualize sermons, could become a combustible explosion where $1 + 1 = 3$.

The Importance of Contextualization

Preserving the culture within a multisite church can compete with valuing the cultural distinctiveness of campus locations. While contextualized preaching values the Word first, it secondarily emphasizes the campus culture. In one campus churches, the church culture often reflects, to a large degree, the culture of the surrounding community, and the messages can be tailored to speak to cultural nuances for maximum effectiveness. Often this is also true in multisite churches; however, it is usually limited to only the founding campus' culture. A multisite church's culture is challenging to pin down, but it is in part the totality of numerous elements. These elements include but are not limited to: vision, mission and strategy statements, cultural values, constitution, and the statement of faith. These documents represent the church's culture unfortunately these were written and reflect the multisite church before it had all of its campuses. Caring for any church's culture is important, yet in a multisite church protecting its culture takes on a heightened importance.

Two of the reasons for an elevated view of a multisite church's culture are: (1) protecting the culture is necessary to be viewed as one church regardless of the number of campuses, and (2) management through alignment is more feasible when the church is dispersed throughout a broad geographic region. A church with more than one campus senses a unique responsibility to be one church regardless of how many locations. As mentioned, there are several ways a multisite church strives to preserve oneness; one way in particular is preaching. One multisite model is having one preacher shared through video to all of that church's campuses. Another multisite model is live preaching at all campuses through a teaching team or campus pastors.¹⁰ With live preaching, it is common to have all preachers sharing the same message.¹¹

A second reason for the elevated view of a multisite church's culture is management through alignment. With more campuses, the breadth of the ministry challenges leadership's capacity. Alignment or centralization is a leadership tool used to manage multiple campuses. Alignment serves several purposes that provide for a healthy organization and efficient operations, and it is also leaned upon to help achieve unity, oneness. Alignment expressed through preaching may include the same passage being preached, the same big idea and points, the same illustrations, applications and the same sermon script. Communicators at some multisite churches with greater alignment are required to present the sermon notes provided, yet at other churches the preacher is expected to exegete the text, research, choose their own illustrations and application points while staying in the same lane as the senior preaching pastor.¹²

¹⁰ The author has interacted with numerous multisite churches primarily through Leadership Network over the previous five years where he has learned about the different preaching models.

¹¹ This is Woodside Bible Church's chosen preaching model.

¹² The author has interacted with numerous multisite churches primarily through Leadership Network over the previous five years where he has learned about the different preaching models.

Multisite churches with several preachers generally have what might be called a preaching lane to maintain alignment. This lane has a center that all preachers are encouraged to respect. As the preacher veers from the center, they may see the yellow line. If the line does not motivate the preacher to return to the center, then the preacher may feel the raised pavement markers. If the preacher continues to move away from center, he will experience the gravel shoulder and finally hit a guardrail. If the guardrail is ignored, then the preacher may go off the cliff. Motivating multisite campus pastors to stay in the preaching lane is accomplished through some degree of sameness in the biblical interpretation, preparation and communication.

Multisite church contextualization may not be determined as much by the sermons, as it is by the founding campus' culture.¹³ It is predictable to have vision, mission, strategy statements as well as core values and statements of faith that were originally drafted by the founding campus prior to the addition of all campuses. The context of these documents, the DNA lane, is often the first campus contextualizing to its culture rather than a holistic view of all campuses. As it relates to preaching, the senior pastor who leads the first campus often writes or steers message preparation; it can be the senior pastor's personal limits to contextualization that narrows the preaching lane for campus pastors.

If multisite churches are to wrestle with unintentional versus intentional contextualization, then leadership needs to reexamine what it means to be one church. This thesis examines the question only as it relates to preaching. The biblical basis for the multisite principle of being one church is found at least in Ephesians 4:4-6. While the guiding principle to be one church is biblically supported, the issue is "how" should a multisite church be one church. The choice to require preaching to be an essential spoke of defining one church may contribute to that

¹³ The author has interacted with numerous multisite churches primarily through Leadership Network over the previous five years where he has evaluated numerous multisite churches.

one goal while likely detracting from contextualization and thereby the culturally nuanced meaningfulness of God's message. It appears that there is nothing biblically requiring a multisite church to be one church through one preacher or one identical message; therefore, it is within the discretion of leadership to reconsider the role of preaching to achieve the goal of being one church.

While it may appear that contextualization and the overarching goal of unity, oneness or sameness are competing goals for the multisite church, they need not be conflicting. In fact, it is possible that oneness could be discovered through intentional sensitivity to distinct cultures. As previously discussed, preachers must contextualize because all interpretation, preparation and communication is inherently context bound. Further, multisite churches have a proclivity to shift context sensitivity away from the culture being ministered to and make it about the multisite church's culture.¹⁴ Rather than tailoring sermon messages for the listeners' culture, the sermons are constructed to tailor listeners to the culture of the church. This does not suggest that the messages are anything less than biblical only that the church or campus may be even more effective and the messages more meaningful if the interpretation, preparation and communication were done with cultural intelligence of the multisite church as well as the listeners' community.

Contextualization throughout Woodside Bible Church

Following the presentation to Woodside's preaching team and conducting eight interviews with members of that team, it is apparent that campus pastors (1) need further coaching on this topic, (2) desire to deepen their cultural sensitivity and (3) believe their preaching model allows messages to be tailored to their unique culture.

¹⁴ The author has interacted with numerous multisite churches primarily through Leadership Network over the previous five years where he has discussed this topic.

The campus pastor and especially the extended preaching team would benefit from further instruction and coaching on contextualized preaching. The author of this thesis co-leads Woodside's sermon development team where passages and topics are identified, sermons scripts are prepared and reviewed, and messages are disseminated to a forty-member preaching team. In addition, the author co-leads the advanced and developing preaching teams' monthly training courses. Sermons delivered at Fourteen campuses are video recorded and reviewed by the author and an outside coach. In light of working closely with the preachers and reviewing their sermons, there is margin for further coaching on contextualization.

Many on Woodside's preaching team have advanced seminary degrees; however, none of the preaching team had a course or even a class on contextualized preaching. Neither were any books with a dominate focus on contextualization required reading. The reading that had been done was from books with broader topics where contextualization represented a few chapters or less. To a degree, contextualization is commonsense; there is something instinctual about the topic. The newest and least experienced and educated preachers on the team interestingly were the most forthright in offering their feedback to the author following the presentation. While they understood the goal of the presentation, similar to most any topic, there are layers of understanding the richness of God's wisdom. From the most experienced to the least experienced preachers on the team, there is a need for further reading, more targeted cultural data gathering and far more time to verbally process tailoring messages to their communities. Some of the interviewees exhibited a solid handle on the topic in theory, but they would benefit from focused time to deepen their cultural sensitivity and verbally process it through the proposed rubric.

Campus pastors interviewed expressed their desire to deepen their cultural sensitivity. Through the interviews, the first thing that became abundantly clear was how much each campus pastor appreciated, cared for and loved the culture he was serving. Each pastor spoke in terms of comparing and contrasting his culture against the backdrop of other cultures; it was not in terms

of one culture was better than another, but that cultures were different. There was an appreciation, of course, for what the pastor enjoyed in that culture, and when they shared the challenges of the culture it was in a way they were determined to figure it out so they could more effectively reach people.

Woodside's preaching model currently allows healthy freedom to contextualize messages, so more intentional, strategic contextualization could be accomplished without much change to the preaching lane. A five-pastor team composed of campus pastors representing different cultures gather six times a year to discuss where their congregations are in terms of the discipleship journey as well as what their people need to take the next spiritual steps. The team identifies topics, passages and assigns which team member will write the sermons. All sermons are reviewed by the executive pastor of campuses as well as the senior pastor. The entire sermon series once reviewed is emailed to the preaching team. The preachers are required to stay within the preaching lane when using the sermon notes. Preachers must respect the passage identified, they must communicate the big idea, and they are required to structure their sermon around the main points outlined in the sermon.

Woodside preachers are permitted to do further research, modify the script provided that explains the text, and modify or replace the script's illustrations and applications. Woodside preaching is a broad lane allowing much freedom to contextualize other than the few non-negotiables. In review of many sermons over the past five years, the preachers often rely on the explain section as written. The use of the illustration section is irregular, but when used it is often an illustration about the pastor's family or personal life. And, the illustration is used to bridge the gap between the first and twenty-first centuries. Instead of using the application sections to point people to practical next steps, the preachers use more of an implication or question-asking approach. The goal appears to be to ask questions for people to ponder allowing the Spirit to direct their mind and their heart toward a personal, Spirit-led practical next-step application.

Woodside's model offers a broad DNA lane for preaching allowing for contextualized preaching. Unfortunately, the freedoms available are not being as effectively used as they could be. The sermon notes prepared are contextualized, in a fairly limited way, by the sermon preparer for his congregation. With no rubric to contextualize sermons, with no focused education or coaching on the topic, with limited encouragement, limited resources and no accountability for gathering cultural intelligence, the preachers mostly have determined the lane of contextualization by the people in attendance on Sundays. This is only between 200-600 people in most campuses that the preacher relies upon to learn the cultural narrative of the entire community.

Contextualized preaching in Woodside's model could be advanced in a variety of ways. Woodside leadership could choose and design a rubric for contextualization. The author would recommend the rubric presented in this thesis. Following the eight interviews, the pastors appear to be in support of the presented rubric. The rubric would identify the inflexible, rim spokes of Scripture and Gospel.

Phase one of the contextualization rubric would be accomplished through a collaborative effort to fill in the key topics in the flexible, rubber tire sections that could be chosen to deepen the knowledge of the spokes. Through this simple process, leadership would come to a greater awareness of the various topics many of their preachers need further development. The rubric's first phase could be accomplished with the preaching team working together.

Phase two of the rubric would require the preaching team to divide into groups focusing on their campus. The rubric's second filter is for the individual campus groups to begin with the five spokes and gain understanding about what their culture's views, beliefs, hopes and fears are about God or "gods", creation, the fall, redemption and restoration. Using the spokes of God's message, preachers may begin with their congregation for cultural intelligence but also certainly speak with many people from the community at large. This step of the filter would radically cause the scales on the preachers' eyes to fall off as they come to realize the predispositions they have

formed are far from the predispositions of people outside their campus. While the preacher must continue preaching to the people who currently attend the campus, the hope is that preachers' contextual filter reorients and they begin to make room in the sermons for people they desire their attenders to invite.

Phase three of the rubric is tailoring the sermon notes for their community specifically. There are five cultural spokes that will guide the preacher in contextualizing the sermon. Spoke one of phase three of the rubric utilizes the preacher's understanding of the cultural narrative to capture attention and create tension in the introduction by identifying views, beliefs, goals, objections or fears of their culture. This would overcome a church outsider's first objection – irrelevance. As the preacher demonstrates cultural knowledge, listeners will engage.

Spoke two of phase three of the rubric requires the preacher to spend time among the community to learn stories of community history, understand where people have come from, and who they have followed in the past. This cultural sensitivity equips the pastor to speak a shared story between the preacher and the people. The apostle Paul knew that in Lystra and Athens contrasted with Antioch, the Greeks did not have the same story of Paul's upbringing and education. So, Paul did not point to the authority of Scripture, but instead pointed to general revelation for evidence of a shared Creator, and a shared humanity and nature. The preacher should not suppose a shared story simply because a few hundred or few thousand people are gathered together for one hour a week. The shared story in Detroit is currently centering around the 50-year anniversary of the Detroit riots in midst of the national riots. The shared story in Dearborn is focused around the automotive history and corporate headquarters. Elements of the shared story must find their way into sermons. Sharing a common story with listeners offers preachers confidence that they are insiders who understand and are being shaped by the ongoing cultural story.

Spoke three of phase three of the rubric finds the preacher spending time among the community - hearing them talk, reading their papers and watching their local news – becoming enculturated by their grammar. In urban contexts, such as Pontiac, Michigan preachers will learn phrases such as “making it” and “hood rich.” In automotive contexts, such as Dearborn, Michigan preachers will learn the language of the car industry. In higher socio-economic cultures such as Troy, Michigan white collar, corporate and leadership language would be far more familiar than in lower socio-economic cultures, such as Warren, Michigan where employee-laden (rather than ownership or management) and blue collar grammar would be effective. Preachers who know, appreciate and use their cultural language naturally will sprinkle their sermons with grammar that will build bridges connecting the preacher with the congregation.

Spoke four of phase three of the rubric necessitates preachers to exegete the culture becoming aware of relevant illustrations that help make first century truths come to life to twenty-first century listeners. In the agrarian culture of the first century, Jesus used soil, seeds and weeds to illustrate for his listeners. Today’s preacher should be aware of popular culture. For example, the top 100 ranked television shows for the African American culture were the lowest ranked shows by a white culture and vice versa.¹⁵ Referencing unpopular television shows will distance the preacher from their congregation. Small towns with successful sports teams can be front page news on a weekly basis. In Algonac, Michigan and Romeo, Michigan campuses, their small towns have had several recent Class A state championships. Illustrations of current news and important local events will build bridges strong enough to carry the gospel.

Spoke five of phase three of the rubric is cultural transformation. The limits of the cultural narrative identified in spoke one of the rubric are now revealed. Preachers help uncover

¹⁵ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16.

where the culture has replaced God with functional gods who are being overly valued or feared. Just as Paul in Athens identified the limits of the altar of worship to the unknown God, preachers may identify a culture of hedonism where residents pursue a state of heightened frenzy and debauchery; this may be an entire city during seasons of the year or the typical weekend on a college campus. Preachers may identify limits of broader narratives such as the gods of financial security and the American dream or the god of a “healthy and successful family.” The preacher’s goal is not merely to call it out, but to expose that the culture gives too much worth or fear by explaining the underlying motivations for their pursuit of these functional gods. Paul did not immediately condemn the Athenians for idolatry, instead he commended their religious pursuit of worship. Later in his sermon, after Paul identified the limits of not knowing who they were worshipping, he used the shared story, cultural grammar and illustrations of Greek poetry reinterpreted through the lens of Scripture. In doing so, Paul offered the listeners unlimited expression of their religious desires in the One True God. Likewise, preachers are to persuade the listeners that a healthy and successful family cannot be fully and ultimately known and experienced outside of God’s family. People who know and do the will of God are part of a spiritual family who have God as their Father and Jesus as their brother. Earthly families can only experience the joy and happiness that they are searching for as they are found inside God’s family. The cultural pursuit of anything other than God will continually come up short, never fully satisfying. Yet, when one places their desires, hopes, beliefs and even fears in God, they are positioned to discover true and lasting satisfaction.

Improving Contextualization in Woodside and the Multisite Church

In this author’s estimation after working and leading the preaching model at Woodside, there is sufficient freedom to intentionally and effectively contextualize sermons. The primary emphasis for improvement would be focused on: (1) preaching team monthly trainings on phase

one of the rubric developing the rim spokes and the rubber tire topics, (2) campus specific coaching with preachers in their geographic areas focusing on phase two of the rubric, and (3) campus specific coaching and sermon evaluation of implementation of phase three of the rubric. The sermon notes organizational format may need to more clearly identify how and where to implement the five cultural spokes. It would be wise to have campus specific groups share what they have been learning at the monthly preaching team meetings. Collaborative leadership is where iron sharpens iron.

A few additional suggestions could be offered to improve Woodside's contextualized preaching. Campus pastors currently have three sermons out of fifty-two weeks to write their own messages. For these few weeks, the guardrails are pulled back even more allowing greater freedom to contextualize. Instead of three annually, six to eight may be optimal. These should not all be one-off or separate sermons, but instead some could continue being one-off sermons and the remainder to be used by the campus pastor to write their own series specifically targeting the cultural narrative.

With Woodside's regional leadership throughout Southeast Michigan, they already have a system that could successfully come along side and coach hundreds of local pastors. Before offering to coach and consult through the Woodside Leadership Institute's regional quarterly gatherings, the fourteen Woodside campuses should more fully work through the contextualization rubric. With fourteen campus locations having used and refined the rubric, the director of communication could share the story of Woodside's journey following God into communities with distinct cultural narratives and how Woodside is contextualizing its messages. The story could be shared through written narrative as well as video. As non-Woodside preachers hear campus pastors share their specific cultural narrative and how they are preaching in context sensitive ways, it may resonate with them. This is how God designed cultures, and how He called preachers to preach in those cultures.

Provided this contextualization rubric panned out to be simple, effective and successfully executed at Woodside's campuses, then the rubric could potentially be shared with Leadership Network. Woodside has a two-decade long relationship with Leadership Network who works with the top four hundred multisite churches. They would most likely be interested in posting a video of Woodside's story of contextualized preaching in a multisite church. Based on the feedback from the churches they work with, they may invite Woodside to share at one of their gatherings or present an online seminar. In addition, during the research phase of this thesis, the author contacted three national experts on multisite: Jim Tomberlin, Ed Stetzer and Jon Fuder. All three of these experts explained that they were not aware of any practical tool or writing on the subject of contextualization in multisite churches. Each specifically requested that the author send them a copy of this thesis when complete. It is possible that God may do something with this work through these leaders.

Opportunities for Further Development

Live preaching at campuses does not represent the broader multisite church. There are many churches who have live preaching at the initial campus and video preaching at other campuses. While these preachers are not able to focus on each cultural narrative, they focus on larger regional or even national cultural narratives. Working with multisite churches who use video preaching would be an interesting area for further development. For example, could the campus pastor at a video venue (who does not preach on the weekend) utilize the contextualization rubric in a way to bring a contextualized non-preaching message of leadership to the campus congregation? Or, could the campus pastor follow the video message with a contextualized application?

Another area for further development would be discerning how to most efficiently discover the cultural narrative. Fuder outlines several excellent steps to learning the narrative:

learn the history and patterns of migration, gather key leaders from the community as a focus group to do a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats or “SWOT” analysis, and conduct a sample survey of an identified area.¹⁶ The top ten ways Fuder says to exegete a culture include: go as a learner, seek out an informant, build a relationship, use an interview guide, analyze your data, filter through biblical worldview, expand into the broader community, network available resources, determine what God is calling you to do, continually evaluate study and explore.¹⁷ While these are excellent ideas to discovering the cultural narrative, they are labor and time intensive. Further study could be done on designing a plan to efficiently exegete a culture to successfully complete phase three of the rubric.

A Final Thought

Every preacher contextualizes every sermon. Unfortunately, preachers are blindfolded as they walk the tightrope of under and over-contextualization. Due to the fallibility of every preacher, their unknown contextualized leanings continue to put them and their congregations in a precarious position. Pastors of multisite churches may not be equipped to know as much as they would like to about each of the cultures represented by campuses, so how could they be expected to contextualize effectively. If there was a simple, practical tool for preachers, it could reveal preachers’ hidden contextualized hermeneutic for reading and interpreting Scripture. Preachers who remove the blindfold to know themselves better are ready to be equipped to avoid over-contextualization. Without blindfolds, these preachers will be able to discover the several cultures represented through their campuses. With a simple, practical tool for contextualization – possibly

¹⁶ John E. Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 71.

¹⁷ Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping*, 21.

the rubric proposed in this thesis – multisite churches could unlock their creativity to preach in every culture with far greater meaningfulness.

APPENDIX A
SEMINAR CLASS NOTES

**CONTEXTUALIZED
PREACHING IN A MULTISITE
CONTEXT:**

MAXIMIZING CONTEXTUALIZATION
WHILE MAINTAINING UNITY AS ONE CHURCH

PRESENTED BY: ROBERT A. BRYANT

INTRODUCTION

- TODAY, THERE IS A BURGEONING RECOGNITION AMONG CHRISTIANS AROUND THE GLOBE THAT IN ORDER FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE TO BE MEANINGFUL TO PEOPLE IT MUST COME TO THEM IN LANGUAGE AND CATEGORIES THAT MAKE SENSE WITHIN THEIR PARTICULAR CULTURE AND LIFE SITUATION. IT MUST BE CONTEXTUALIZED.
- DEAN FLEMMING, CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (2005), 13

INTRODCUTION

- CONTEXTUALIZATION HAS TO DO WITH HOW THE GOSPEL AUTHENTICALLY COMES TO LIFE IN EACH NEW CULTURAL, SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL SETTING.

INTRODUCTION

- ALTHOUGH THE TERM CONTEXTUALIZATION WAS QUITE RECENTLY MINTED, THE ACTIVITY OF EXPRESSING AND EMBODYING THE GOSPEL IN CONTEXT-SENSITIVE WAYS HAS CHARACTERIZED THE CHRISTIAN MISSION FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURES BEAR WITNESS TO CONTEXTUALIZING GOD'S WORD TO GATHERINGS OF PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR LANGUAGE, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND A MYRIAD OF OTHER CULTURAL DISTINCTIVES. GOD INITIALLY CONTEXTUALIZED HIS MESSAGE TO A PEOPLE WHO BECAME KNOWN AS JEWS; YET, IN TIME, GOD'S MESSAGE WAS RE-CONTEXTUALIZED TO REACH THE GENTILES.

- DEAN FLEMMING, CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (2005), 15

INTRODUCTION

- THE CONCERN WITH CONTEXTUALIZATION IS WHEN THE VALUES OF A CULTURE ARE GIVEN AUTHORITY OVER SCRIPTURE. IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE CHRISTIANITY PALATABLE, SOME PREACHERS HAVE MISTAKENLY REDEFINED DOCTRINE IN CULTURAL TERMS.
- WHEN CONTEXTUALIZATION IS DONE FAITHFULLY AND SKILLFULLY, WE SHOW PEOPLE HOW THE BASELINE CULTURAL NARRATIVES OF THEIR SOCIETY AND THE HOPES OF THEIR HEARTS CAN ONLY FIND RESOLUTION AND FULFILLMENT IN JESUS.

INTRODUCTION

- CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING IS INEVITABLE
 - PREACHERS ARE CONTEXTUALIZED BEINGS. THEIR EXPERIENCES AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES HAVE MOLDED THEM PRIOR TO ENTERING THEIR CURRENT CONTEXT.
 - THE CONTEXTS THAT PREACHERS HAVE BEEN RAISED IN, LIVED IN AND WORKED HAVE ALL GRADUALLY SHAPED THEIR PREDISPOSITIONS.
 - OFTEN PREACHERS ARE UNAWARE THAT WHEN THEY PREACH THEY ARE UNINTENTIONALLY REQUIRING THE CONGREGATION TO BE CONTEXTUALIZED TO THEM.



- White Lake
- Lake Orion
- Troy
- Plymouth
- Farmington Hills
- Lapeer
- Romeo
- Royal Oak
- Warren
- Algonac
- Dearborn
- Pontiac
- Detroit

MULTISITE CHURCH

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

MULTISITE CHURCH & CONTEXTUALIZATION

- CONTEXTUALIZATION CAN BE CHALLENGING IN A MULTISITE CHURCH
 - BEING ONE CHURCH IN MANY LOCATIONS REQUIRES UNITY AND ALIGNMENT, YET THE CAMPUSES MAY BE IN CULTURALLY DISTINCT AREAS
 - ALL CAMPUSES ARE IDENTICAL IN VISION, MISSION, STRATEGY, VALUES, CONSTITUTION AND PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRIES ("DNA")
 - THE DNA ESTABLISHES THE LANE WITHIN WHICH EACH PASTOR MINISTERS

MULTISITE CHURCH & CONTEXTUALIZATION

QUESTION:

DOES THE DNA LANE PROVIDE SUFFICIENT FREEDOM FOR THE CAMPUS PREACHER TO EFFECTIVELY CONTEXTUALIZE SERMONS TO THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE IN ITS CONGREGATION?

MULTISITE CHURCH & CONTEXTUALIZATION

- DO WOODSIDE'S CAMPUSES REFLECT DISTINCT CULTURAL NARRATIVES?
 - TROY, LAKE ORION, WHITE LAKE, PLYMOUTH, FARMINGTON HILLS
 - PONTIAC, DETROIT, WARREN
 - ALGONAC
 - ROMEO, LAPEER
 - ROYAL OAK
 - DEARBORN

MULTISITE CHURCH & CONTEXTUALIZATION

QUESTION:

IF WOODSIDE CAMPUSES REFLECT DISTINCT CULTURAL NARRATIVES, THEN DOES OUR DNA LANE PROVIDE SUFFICIENT FREEDOM FOR CAMPUS PASTORS TO EFFECTIVELY CONTEXTUALIZE SERMONS TO THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE IN ITS CONGREGATION?

CONTEXTUALIZATION

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS

- THE FOUNDATION OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IS BRILLIANTLY SEEN VIA THE INCARNATION OF JESUS
- WHEN JESUS TOOK ON THE LIKENESS OF MAN, HE DEMONSTRATED CONTEXTUALIZATION
- JESUS' CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE HUMAN CONTEXT
 - JESUS BEING BORN UNTO MARY AND JOSEPH IN BETHLEHEM, WAS A MALE, PALESTINIAN JEW, "BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW." BORN AND RAISED IN THE JEWISH CULTURE, JESUS WAS FULLY ARAMAIC WITH A GALILEAN ACCENT.
 - "GOD IN JESUS BECAME SO MUCH A PART OF A SPECIFIC HUMAN CONTEXT THAT MANY NEVER EVEN RECOGNIZED THAT HE HAD COME FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE."
 - CHARLES KRAFT, CHRISTIANITY IN CULTURE (2005), 175

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS

- JESUS TRAINS US THAT FROM IMMERSING ONESELF IN THE CULTURE ONE CAN SHARE GOD'S TRUTH IN CULTURALLY SENSITIVE WAYS:
 - JESUS COMMUNICATED THROUGH THE COMMON LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS
 - HE USED EVERY DAY, CULTURALLY RELEVANT ILLUSTRATIONS SUCH AS FISHING, FARMING, WEEDS, WINESKINS, SOIL AND SALT
 - JESUS ADAPTED HIS CONTENT AND STYLE OF COMMUNICATION – RICH YOUNG RULER, WOMAN AT THE WELL, NICODEMUS AND PETER

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS

- "THE INCARNATION OF JESUS MAKES CONTEXTUALIZATION NOT JUST A POSSIBILITY BUT AN OBLIGATION. IT ESTABLISHES A PARADIGM FOR MEDIATING GOD'S REDEEMING PRESENCE IN THE WORLD TODAY."
- DEAN FLEMMING, CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (2005), 21

PAUL'S CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING

- ANTIOCH – ACTS 13 – JEWS
- LYSTRA – ACTS 14 – UNSOPHISTICATED PAGANS
- ATHENS – ACTS 17 – SOPHISTICATED PAGANS

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH

- THE AUDIENCE
 - PRIMARY AUDIENCE WAS JEWS IN A SYNAGOGUE
 - SECONDARY AUDIENCE INCLUDED GENTILE CONVERTS AND GOD-FEARERS

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH

- PAUL'S SERMON

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH

- INTENTIONALITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE SERMON
 - HE SPOKE AS AN "INSIDER"
 - HE RELIED ON THE SCRIPTURES
 - ADDRESSING THE CONGREGATION
 - STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH

- CONTEXTUALIZATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE
 - JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHESED MESSIAH
 - JEWS EXECUTED JESUS
 - INTENTIONALLY AND PATIENTLY MOVED TOWARD THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE
 - SPECIFICALLY CONNECTED WITH GENTILES
 - USED GREEK SPEAKING TECHNIQUES

PAUL'S SERMON IN ANTIOCH

- RESULTS OF THE CONTEXTUALIZED SERMON
 - BEGGED PAUL TO RETURN THE NEXT SABBATH TO PREACH AGAIN
 - MANY PERSONAL DISCUSSIONS FOLLOWING THE SERMON
 - CONVERSIONS TO CHRISTIANITY
 - RESPONSE SUFFICIENT TO PLANT A CHURCH

PAUL'S CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING

- ANTIOCH – ACTS 13 – JEWS
- LYSTRA – ACTS 14 – UNSOPHISTICATED PAGANS
- ATHENS – ACTS 17 – SOPHISTICATED PAGANS

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- THE AUDIENCE
 - PRIMARY AUDIENCE WAS UNEDUCATED, PEASANT POLYTHEISTS
 - THEIR REPUTATION WAS "PRIMITIVE RUSTICS WHO LIVED IN THE CULTURAL BACKWATERS OF THE GRECO-ROMANS CIVILIZATION." DEAN P. BECHARD, "PAUL AMONG THE RUSTICS: THE LYSTRAN EPISODE, AND LUCAN APOLOGETIC," CBQ 63 (2001): 84-101.
 - NO SIMILARITY TO THE DEVOUT GOD-FEARING GENTILES IN ANTIOCH
 - NO EVIDENCE OF INFLUENCE BY JEWISH SCRIPTURES OR GREEK PHILOSOPHY
 - SINCERE BELIEVERS IN TRADITIONAL GREEK RELIGION
 - NO KNOWLEDGE OR APPRECIATION FOR THE SCRIPTURES OR A MONOTHEISTIC WORLDVIEW

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- PAUL'S SERMON
 - ACTS 14:8-20
 - LYSTRA DID NOT HAVE A SYNAGOGUE, SO PAUL PREACHED IN THE STREETS
 - HEALED A CRIPPLED MAN
 - APPRECIATING THE DIVINE POWER, THE LYCAONIANS DECIDED TO WORSHIP THEM
 - PAUL STOPPED THEM AND PREACHED

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- INTENTIONALITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE SERMON
 - IDENTIFIED COMMON GROUND – SAME NATURE, SAME HUMANITY
 - GREEK STRUCTURE TO THE SERMON
 - THEOLOGICAL PREACHING
 - MONOTHEISM
 - CREATOR – MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH AND THE SEA
 - ONE GOD FOR ALL NATIONS RATHER THAN A NATIONAL DEITY
 - CREATOR'S GOODNESS IS A SILENT WITNESS
 - GOD SENT THE RAINS THAT PROVIDED FRUITFUL SEASONS OF FOOD AND GLADNESS
- DEAN FLEMMING, CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (2005), 69

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- CONTEXTUALIZATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE
 - ADDRESSED THEM AS "MEN" RATHER THAN BROTHERS AS HE DID IN ANTIOCH
 - QUICKLY MOVED TO CORRECT THEOLOGICAL ERRORS
 - POINTED TO ONE TRUE GOD AND TOLD THEM TO TURN FROM VAIN IDOLS
 - YET, PAUL DID NOT SPECIFICALLY SHARE JESUS

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- PAUL DID NOT SHARE JESUS
 - PAUL'S MESSAGE IDENTIFIED THE CREATOR IS THE ONE TRUE GOD, AND THEY SHOULD TURN FROM THEIR IDOLATRY OF MANY GODS.
 - PAUL'S STARTING POINT WAS DIFFERENT THAN IN ANTIOCH
 - HE COULD NOT BEGIN WITH THE SCRIPTURES
 - THEY DID NOT BELIEVE IN A MONOTHEISTIC GOD
 - THE GOAL OF THE 1ST MESSAGE WAS TO POINT THEM TO THE ONE GOD AWAY FROM MANY GODS

PAUL'S SERMON IN LYSTRA

- RESULTS OF THE CONTEXTUALIZED SERMON
 - SUCCESSFULLY STOPPED THE SACRIFICIAL WORSHIP
 - JEWS TRAVELLING 100 MILES CAME TO STONE PAUL TO DEATH
 - LYSTRA DISCIPLES HELPED PAUL (DISCIPLES = NEW BELIEVERS)
 - DISCIPLES INCLUDED TIMOTHY, HIS MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER (ESV STUDY BIBLE, FOOTNOTE ON ACTS 16:1)
 - THE LORD HAD "OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH TO THE GENTILES." ACTS 14:27

PAUL'S CONTEXTUALIZED PREACHING

- ANTIOCH – ACTS 13 – JEWS
- LYSTRA – ACTS 14 – UNSOPHISTICATED PAGANS
- ATHENS – ACTS 17 – SOPHISTICATED PAGANS

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- THE AUDIENCE
 - PRIMARY AUDIENCE WAS EDUCATED POLYTHEISTS
 - THE PHILOSOPHIES OF THE STOICS AND EPICUREANS HAD BECOME THE RELIGION OF THE DAY
 - WHILE IN ATHENS, PAUL PREACHED IN THE SYNAGOGUE TO THE JEWS AND GOD-FEARERS
 - HE WITNESSED TO ATHENIANS IN THE MARKETPLACE
 - SERMON WAS PRIMARILY DIRECTED TO THE AREOPAGUS, THE ATHENIAN SENATE

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- PAUL'S SERMON
 - ACTS 17:16-34
 - AFTER PREACHING AT THE SYNAGOGUE, HE EVANGELIZED IN THE MARKETPLACE
 - PHILOSOPHERS BELIEVING HIM TO BE INTRODUCING NEW GODS TOOK HIM TO THE AREOPAGUS
 - PAUL'S MESSAGE WAS THAT HE DECLARED THE GOD WHOM THEY ALREADY WORSHIPPED
 - PAUL INTERPRETED GREEK POETRY COULD ONLY FIND ITS FULFILLMENT IN THE ONE TRUE GOD
 - THIS GOD IS JESUS WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD
 - PAUL CALLED THEM TO REPENT OF THEIR POLYTHEISTIC IDOLATRY AND GET RIGHT WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST (FOCUS WAS ONLY ON THE RESURRECTION AND NOT JESUS' DEATH)

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- INTENTIONALITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE SERMON
 - PAUL WAS A MODEL OF COURTESY ALLOWING HIM TO BE A GREEK TO THE GREEKS (CHARLES JEFFERSON, THE CHARACTER OF PAUL (1927), 190.
 - DESPITE BEING AGITATED BY THE IDOLATRY, AND THEIR DISRESPECT IN CALLING HIM A BABBLER
 - MASTERFUL INTRODUCTION
 - COMMENDED THEIR INTEREST IN RELIGION
 - USING THEIR RELIGIOUS IDOLS, HE CLAIMED TO KNOW THE GOD WHO WAS UNKNOWN BY THEM

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- INTENTIONALITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE SERMON
 - USING THEIR IDOLS, PAUL EVADED THE CHARGE OF INTRODUCING STRANGE GODS
 - HE CREATED DISSONANCE BY EXPOSING THEIR IGNORANCE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE ONE TRUE GOD
 - HE USED GENERAL REVELATION TO CREATED COMMON GROUND
 - HE MOVED MORE SLOWLY AND PATIENTLY THAN AT LYSTRA TO THE HEART OF HIS ARGUMENT

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- INTENTIONALITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE SERMON
 - PAUL ILLUSTRATED WITH GREEK POETRY
 - DEMONSTRATED PERSONAL FAMILIARITY WITH GREEK CULTURE
 - HE QUOTED THEIR "RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY" THE POETS
 - PAUL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE POETS WAS THAT ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT COULD ONLY BE FOUND IN JESUS
 - THE GENIUS WAS THAT HE USED THEIR IDEAS AND LANGUAGE TO TRANSFORM THEIR WORLDVIEW

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- CONTEXTUALIZATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE
 - PAUL REINTERPRETED THE POETS QUOTE "WE ARE GOD'S OFFSPRING"
 - NOT THE STOIC PANTHEISTIC SENSE, BUT A BIBLICAL SENSE OF BEING CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD
 - THIS BECOMES THE PLATFORM FOR PAUL'S CRITIQUE OF PAGAN IDOLATRY – IF THE LIVING GOD MADE US IN HIS IMAGE, WE CANNOT CREATE GODS OUT OF LIFELESS OBJECTS
 - SEEKING GOD IS NOT A PHILOSOPHICAL QUEST TO KNOW GOD THROUGH NATURE, RATHER FULFILLMENT IS KNOWING THE RISEN ONE

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- PAUL DID NOT SHARE JESUS' DEATH
 - IN ACTS 17:30-31, PAUL UNVEILED WHO THE ALTAR ULTIMATELY WAS FOR – JESUS
 - PAUL EXHORTED THEM TO REPENT FOR GOD WOULD JUDGE ALL PEOPLE
 - GOD'S PROOF OF THESE CLAIMS IS THAT HE RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD
 - PAUL DID NOT PREACH ON THE WHAT THE DEATH OF CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED, INSTEAD HIS RESURRECTION AND FINAL JUDGMENT
 - BASED ON ACTS 17:18-20, PAUL WAS ORIGINALLY BROUGHT TO THE AREOPAGUS FOR TEACHING THE RESURRECTION

PAUL'S SERMON IN ATHENS

- RESULTS OF THE CONTEXTUALIZED SERMON
 - THE AREOPAGUS DID NOT CONDEMN PAUL FOR TEACHING STRANGE GODS
 - SOME DESIRED TO HEAR PAUL TEACH AGAIN
 - SOME WERE GRANTED FAITH TO BELIEVE UNTO SALVATION
 - SOME MOCKED AND LAUGHED AT PAUL

EVALUATING PAUL'S SERMONS

- PAUL DID NOT USE A SINGULAR APPROACH, INSTEAD HE WAS SENSITIVE TO EACH CONTEXT
- CONTENT AND DELIVERY WERE DECIDED IN LIGHT OF THE AUDIENCE'S
 - LANGUAGE, HERITAGE, RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING AND OCCASION FOR THE SPEECH
 - JEWS BELIEVED IN SCRIPTURES, MONOTHEISM AND A PROPHESED MESSIAH - SPECIAL REVELATION
 - PAGAN DID NOT KNOW THE SCRIPTURES, BELIEVED POLYTHEISM - GENERAL REVELATION
 - FOR SIMPLE LYSTRAN PAGANS, PAUL SPOKE OF GOD PROVIDING RAIN AND CROPS AND WAS HIGHER CHALLENGE
 - FOR SOPHISTICATED ATHENIAN PAGANS, HE USED PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY, AND WAS SOFTER ON CHALLENGE
- PAUL'S SERMONS ARE MORE THAN A DESCRIPTION, THEY ARE A PRESCRIPTION

EVALUATING PAUL'S SERMONS

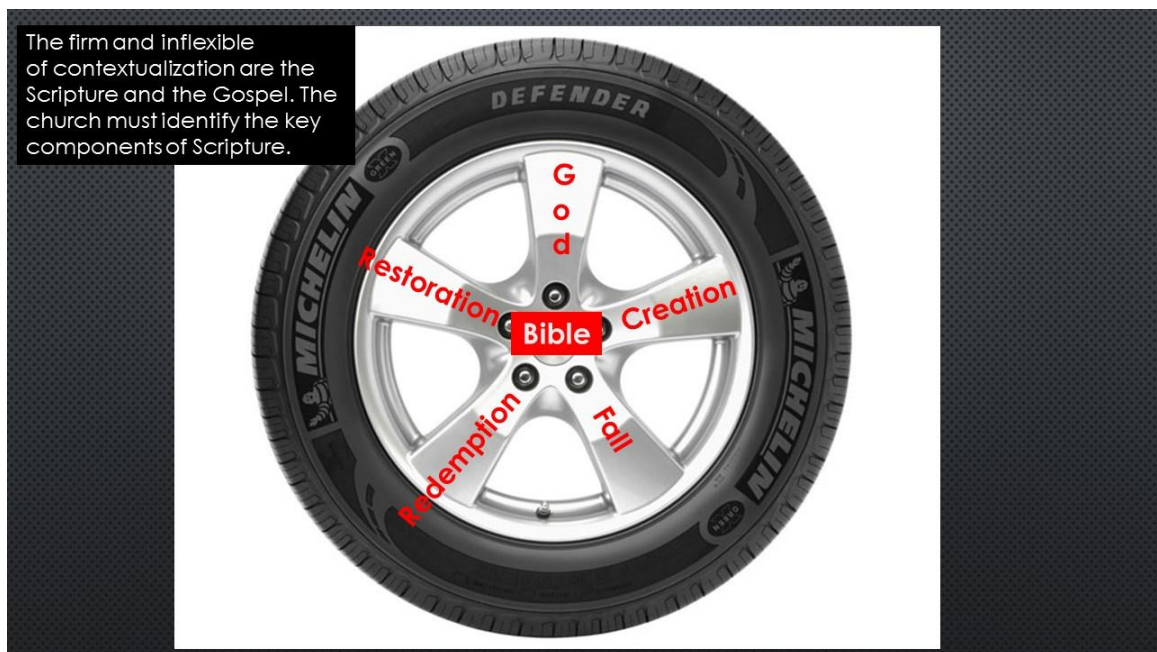
- DESPITE CONTEXTUALIZATION, PAUL DID NOT COMPROMISE THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL
 - HE TAUGHT HOW THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD WAS DEFICIENT
 - HE TAUGHT THAT ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT
 - HE TAUGHT THAT CHRIST WAS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO THEIR SIN
 - NOTE: WHILE THE FULL GOSPEL IS NOT TAUGHT IN THE CONTEXTS, AT LEAST ONE OR MORE OF THE GOSPEL COMPONENTS ARE SHARED

PRACTICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

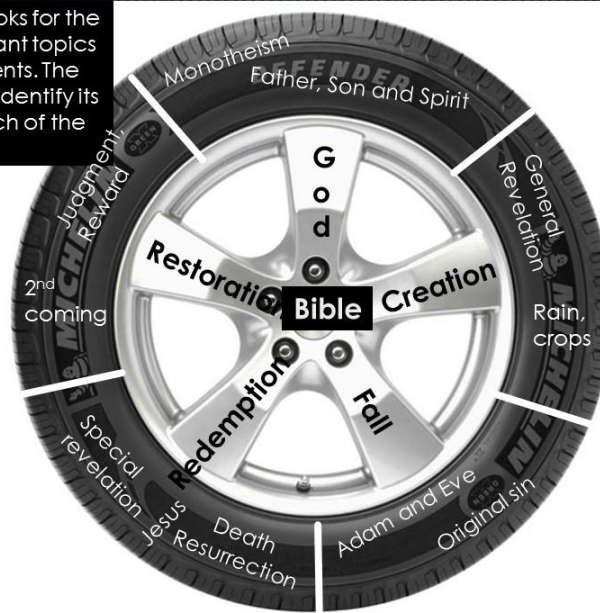
REMAINING BIBLICALLY ACCURATE WHILE CULTURALLY RELEVANT



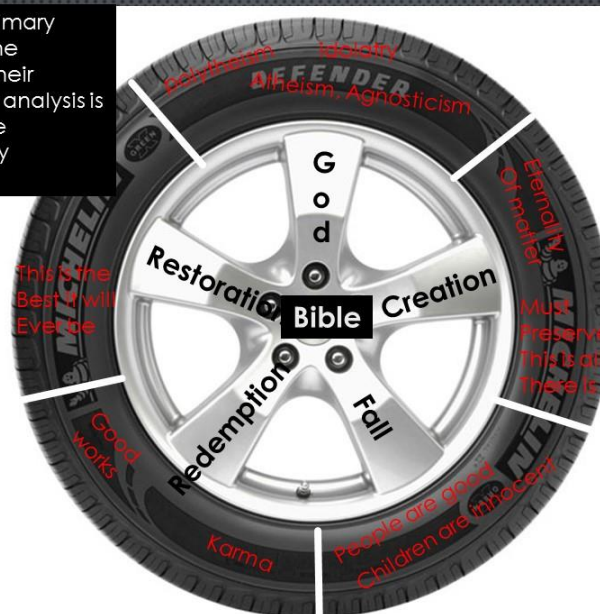
Tires need the firm and inflexible rim while the synthetic rubber must flex and contour to different types of roads.



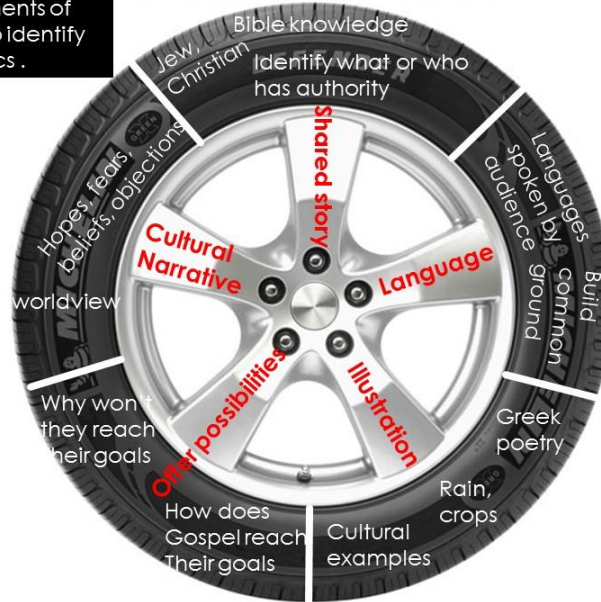
Contextualization looks for the most culturally relevant topics within the key elements. The church must clearly identify its key topics within each of the key components.



With the church's primary message clarified, the preacher analyzes their culture. The content analysis is performed within the framework of the key components.



Identify key components of cultural analysis, also identify the key cultural topics .



Conversations & Surveys

Would you give thought to the illustrations and offer your insight on the following:

- The tire representing the firm, inflexible as well as the rubber which contours to the road;
- What are the key components of Scripture/Gospel and the related topic areas;
- Using the 5 key cultural components would you analyze your culture;



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR LORENZO SEWELL

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - Overall, I did like the illustration. The steel is the essential and the rubber is ways to adjust for the people. Thought it was powerful.
 - Like the flexibility of the tire.

2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - Did not disagree with the 5 key spokes. Spot on for the essentials.

3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
Monotheism/Polytheism	General revelation – whole earth declares glory of Lord	Works based Must work for your salvation
Deity of Christ – because of Jehovah Witnesses	Goes back to word faith theology – have ability with words to create. Some have been taught they could speak into existence from past churches. Deification of humans with ability to create.	Some don't believe man is totally depraved; Good enough today, then it may be good enough. Hard for people to understand that original sin and depravity.
Moorish Americans – White supremacists to protect themselves they pledge allegiance	Genesis 1:26 – create man in his image.	

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	
Baptism – must be careful because they can think it is redemptive; or if you don't get baptized then not saved.	Do not talk much about pre, mid, post trib. General understanding of Christ's returning.	

Apostolic faith – largest movement in African American culture. Tongues – must believe in a second baptism.		
Acts 2:38 becomes a proof text – must get baptized in the name of Jesus to speak in tongues.		

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
Mormonism	Creation points to a God	
Jehovah Witnesses	Don't see many battles	
Trinity	General reverence toward God	
Survival is supreme worth – placed above God		

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	
Is circumcision necessary for salvation?		
Would God really love Pontiac?		

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	

6. Preaching in Woodside's multisite model.
 - a. Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - Paul did this well because he was called to; he preached the 3 sermons. There is a specific calling. For Lorenzo, he must get the message to the kitchen table. Needs to touch on current events – schools shutting down. Needs Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand.
 - b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - No limits because we are having a conversation about contextualization.
 - Because we are working on the racial reconciliation with the urban/suburban churches.
 - The only limit is that most campuses have similar socio-economic background – middle class.
 - One campus is Pontiac that is unique – poor culture.
 - He appreciates the conversations.
 - c. Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - He knows his flock. He uses his freedom.
 - We need to learn about our congregations even better.
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - Learn the flock/congregation.
 - Pastor swapping at different campuses.
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
 - This is a calling. Preachers, by nature of their calling, can do this well. There needs to be equipping and training.
 - We need to use good analogies, good food and good music people and that generally connects with the audience.

INTERVIEW WITH RYAN RUSSELL

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
2. Tire illustration works. You are automatically contextualizing based on who you are. Need to have key, uncompromising, inflexible spokes.
3. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified. God, creation, man/fall, redemption/Christ, response, restoration

Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 – God	Spoke 2 – creation/man	Spoke 3 - fall
Divinity, being different from us, greatness, completeness	Order – created order, God created in a certain type of way	Rootedness of sin in man’s nature
Who is God – Trinity	Perfection – God’s desires for creation and how he created for a purpose	Humility by Andrew Murray; Serpent as relates to man Disobedience vs perfect order.
		Hiding is breeding ground for sin.

Spoke 4 – Christ	Spoke 5 – Response	Spoke -Restoration
Person of Christ, walking through gospels	Holy Spirit – His function and how we respond; Philip is a clear story; he obeyed.	Why do we respond, why do we go through these things for future grace and future glory.
Cross – what it means; where we receive this redemption	Who we are after creation, fall and redemption so royal priesthood. This power with us.	Purpose – why run this race, why this affliction for future glory.
Baptism – buried with Christ and alive with Christ	Go to ends of earth to make disciples. Fellowship, prayers, breaking bread.	Reunification – getting into created order, spend time with God the way it was meant to be.
Completes spokes 1,2,3		

- The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 – Creation/man	Spoke 3 - fall
Who actually is God vs the abuse of God in other churches; how God is contorted to fit man’s views. E.g. you are	Slavery – how do we handle creation with a people who have been enslaved.	Not just this culture that is experiencing the fall; rootedness of sin in our people. They would differentiate from other campuses because of

blessed by God if you bless the man of God.		privilege. Why aren't people in Troy experiencing the consequences of sin the same as us in poverty.
	Overcompensation – how creation has been misconstrued; the Mandela affect – created to be kings and queens so don't listen to the white man; militant royalty	

Spoke 4 - Christ	Spoke 5 – Response	Spoke 6 – Restoration
They feel that they may have fallen further, there is a grace that is that much greater for them. Here they need him for things others take for granted.	Gifting – Spirit gifts – cultural and racial because prestige is seen in your church with what God has gifted you with; they don't have much other so they highly value spiritual gifts; they brag with pride on their spiritual gifts.	There is a place coming where you don't experience this pain and no more tears. It is very positive and easily preached message. People believe the future hope of heaven. It takes a back seat to Jesus; they want a deliverer.
Liberty -	Royal priesthood – need to do much deprogramming. Spiritual elevation of pastor because they have greater measure of grace of God. They don't see the access to God - it is more through the pastor. Cultural tradition where pastor is lifted up so highly. Seen with chairs on stage for pastors.	Trying to explain a Picasso painting to people who have only ever held a crayon.
He is understood well as a Savior; evangelism is easier.		
Baptism – lots of different views on baptism in culture that are unbiblical; baptism - washing away of sins, baptism of the spirit; so is Christ enough? Works-based, saving themselves in addition to Christ.		

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
Abused by people in power - do not trust school board or executive branch; trust for churches	Repurposing these misconceptions – no stranger to heartbreak, no stranger to pain; shared story of pain but it looks different; they can dismiss pain/heartbreak if not connected	Slang – lit, hoodrich, making it – it’s a different language; using them in urban culture is huge to connect.
Hope – “making it” the guy who they see on the street who has what they want \$600 in pocket and certain shoes; “hood rich” guy with outward appearance of riches;	Authority in culture – elders have raised two generations of their family; people will listen to the old timer in community. Hoodrich guy has a loud voice, athletes have authority. Church leadership has lots of authority.	
Beliefs – every white family has a mom/dad, they are immune to tragedy, family structure is worse		

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	
Hoodrich, making it	Possibilities are so much greater than just “making it”	
Sports works for men and women – women love the athlete as much as men want to be the athlete (misplaced desire)	Showing different measuring sticks of success	

6. Preaching in Woodside’s multisite model.
- Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - Being seen as an outsider then understood as an insider.

- People believe me because there is a relationship, or the speaker is convincing.
- b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - Lack of relational depth with congregants. If preacher is never around, then that relational deficit will limit contextualization.
 - c. Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - No. Tried a lot of different attempts. Using the freedoms well.
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - Mandatory relational research if going to another campus/context. Talking with pastor before going and preaching in that culture. What is community narrative and church narrative? What series worked? What worked and hasn't worked in the church?
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
 - Nothing else.

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JEREMY WRITEBOL

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - Thought it made sense and it was really good for flexibility and inflexible.
 - Don't see any weaknesses.
2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - Revelation – how do we know, epistemology, authority; Paul appeals to authority;
 - Likes the 5.
 - God – monotheistic vs Trinitarian. Look at the terminology in the spoke. Every culture as a theism, creation narrative, cosmology of sin, redemption and restoration. Could universally apply them to any culture. Also the same structure of a story.
3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 -God	Spoke 2 – Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
What's his lack of limitations/bounds? Almighty, all powerful over all things. Does God fully	In Christian culture did he start it and back out, deism, evolution. What is God's	Need to get people to acknowledge that evil exists. Can show evil is in the world.

know all things? India has many gods for many things, so does one God know it all or can do it all.	role with creation and science? This one topic/component shuts down most of our cultural audience in the educational arena.	Then, they need to see that they have personal sin/evil. Hitler is evil, but much harder for people to say that they have evil in their own heart.
What is his relationship with humanity? Does he reveal himself? Does he speak? Does he, like Zeus, sleep with women and have children?	Big strokes – God made everything and leave the agency alone; how he does that we can leave for another time.	Death. The universality of death as a result of the fall. I know I’m a sinner because there will be death.

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 – Restoration /consummation	Center – Bible/Authority
Change from redemption to hero. How are we redeemed? How is the fall reversed? All cultures have a hero. Who is savior/hero?	How is everything made whole again? What is outcome of redemption? Is it new earth/new heaven, social justice, everything bad made right again. New body; not just spiritualism in heaven but holistic – body, kingdom	Idea of law – is it fair that we die – only because death is a result of sin/imperfection and violation of the law.
How am I redeemed? Works or how do I contribute to it?	Can talk of tire in 2 ways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal – how does this affect ME; personal sin; - Universal scope – how does all of this affect all of creation 	
Justice – preserving redemption is preserving God’s justice. God doesn’t let people off the hook.		
Notion of a sacrifice – not religious always, but to find acceptance must sacrifice self-worth, time, and money for others to accept me		

- The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he

noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community. From a Plymouth perspective

Spoke 1 – God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
What they value becomes a functional God – affluence, success (positional, achieved), success in a family (suburban myth), security (financial, physical – safe place to live) – pursuits of life were threatened or lost, it would devastate you.	If we are self-made people or come out from ourselves then we will feel more inclined to save ourselves. In Detroit – we’ve made ourselves by our industry, these become fabrics of who we are as a city; cultural value – we’ve made ourselves. So Detroiters desire to produce, we create. Americans as entrepreneurs.	Anything that threatens the existence of God – security, affluence, success – that is where people feel brokenness. The American dream is a law mentality; if I don’t work hard then I have violated cultural morae - if I don’t keep up with the Jones. We are so independent and autonomous. We only admit falling when it hasn’t worked out for ourselves.
	If we are creators, then God is irrelevant in some ways. God helps those who help themselves. We look at natural creation – pragmatically think what do I think and how do I manipulate the materials so that I can create what I want. Take creation for granted, neglected, disregarded, no value attached.	

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	
Who is the hero? Works-based, good works; pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Some bend toward religious activity – religiosity – health, wealth and gospel; I think positive	Where we become enlightened that we are the god – I’m affluent, secure – I’ve arrived; never worry about these things again. We’ve achieved what we chased after.	

and happy thoughts, self-actualize and be redeemed.		
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5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.
- These are the commodities to the gospel story.
 - This is the vehicle for the tire.
 - This is for sermon writing. This is what moves the tires.
 - Nailed down most important things in culture.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
Functional gods		

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	
Pop culture – what pop culture are you importing; need a shared story with relevant illustrations; do I know myself well enough to connect with them.		

6. Preaching in Woodside’s multisite model.
- Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - It is an important part of it because it brings the truth of God into today; connect with people in the audience and city. It must have a priority.
 - Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside’s model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - Framework is a good skeleton but also a barrier – how the main points are worded may not be fluent with how the preacher would say it, so it’s not natural. “Choose your investment” may not connect with a poor culture vs a middle class; would they use that word investment? It is not the vernacular of the community.
 - Does Woodside’s model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - Feel freedom to embrace and contextualize best
 - Big idea, points and scripture text – broad lane
 - What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - Conceptualize the points rather than making points concrete.
 - How would you say that in your city?
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?

- Talk about locational context – Paul speaks to Jewish synagogue and then marketplace and corporate worship.

INTERVIEW WITH JEFF WALLACE

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - Unique way to illustrate. Clarity increased as it was discussed. Illustration could be easily modified to touch on different areas.
 - The number of spokes could easily be modified up or down. This is good as it allows the user freedom to adjust the illustration. This takes away the concern.
 - Great idea. Gives flexibility and a standard that we cannot violate the spokes which must be uncompromising but also able to be flexible in the rubber tire area to be culturally appropriate.
2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - 5 spokes were spot on. The necessary elements – who God is, how he dealt with us and how he will deal with us.
 - The presentation demonstrates that Paul reveals the full gospel message need not be in every sermon. Nuances is in knowing and identifying audience. For those who have a Jesus-centric hermeneutic, they have no room for less than all the spokes.
 - Having the freedom of different spokes allows for maximum individual and corporate cultural adaptation.
3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 – God's existence	Spoke 2 – How God operated in the past (creation/fall)	Spoke 3 – How God operates now (redemption)
Views on God	How he created – a way He chose to operate	How God interacts with people is different. Instead of being blind obedience, we have a “way” to follow
Is there God at all	God of the Old Testament – ebb and flow – intervened only when necessary for the salvation of his people	The cross is how we find our way to God. He operates regularly with us through the cross.
Is he an absentee God – deism		Also through the Holy Spirit. Now we all have access to Him.

Is he overinvolved - puppeteer		
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Spoke 4 – How God will operate in the future (restoration)		
Through the restorative properties; there will be judgment for the condemned and heaven for his children.		

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 – God’s existence	Spoke 2 – How God operated in the past	Spoke 3 – How God operates now
Opposing worldviews	Some are still living in Old Testament time such as the Jews who are still waiting for the coming Messiah. Paul had unique identity and shared history with the audience before bringing Christ to the forefront.	Other disciples were far more Jewish in their approach. Peter was over-contextualizing to the Jewish custom and culture.
May not agree to God’s existence	Must start at the beginning and gradually bring people along.	The Holy Spirit worked through the men, Peter and Paul, in different ways. Yet the Spirit brought fruitfulness.

Spoke 4 – How God will operate in the future		
We have hope of the restoration – the way he worked before and the way he works now will lead to hope in the future.		
People alive at the time who don’t believe will be given another chance between the		

rapture and the second coming.		
Holy Spirit will be active during that time.		

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
Worldview (Muslim)		
Could not think of additional items. Each of them is individual and unique to the audience.		
This allows the illustration to expand to the needs at the time.		

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	

6. Preaching in Woodside's multisite model.
- Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - He knows his audience in the teaching, they are all believers. He uses all the spokes because in his audience is 100% Bible-believing Christians.
 - Even though talking to believers, the teacher/preacher brings baggage to a text. We need to be self-aware and identify our own baggage. We may assume a level of knowledge that they don't have. Must include oneself in this part.
 - Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - No different between Woodside and a one-campus church. Contextualize to the congregation in front of you. There is much freedom in our current model even with sermon notes because preachers can re-write everything but big idea and points.
 - Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - I think it does allow for quite a bit of freedom, but we also need some continuity with notes.
 - What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?

- Make people aware of their biases – preacher and congregant.
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
- Bob did a great job
 - Learned in the presentation about the sermons of Paul to help with contextualization model
 - Presentation was not a re-hash of the paper

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR DAVE CARLSON

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - The inflexible carries the flexible.
 - In contextualization, can override the scripture. The rim carries the tire. It's not the ground that dictates.
 - It allowed the goal of preaching – where is the tire going? One wheel is preaching and the other wheel is ministry.
 - Differentiating abstract to the specific. We rest on the key biblical concepts.
 - It did not process the long-term view of contextualization. Speak to a culture and challenge a culture. The tire is always shaping to the context. Somethings in the gospel that are inherently revolting to certain cultures. Concern is over-contextualization.
2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - Like the 5 consider two changes – (1) Bible in the center, (2) historicity of the gospel. Some liberals would say historicity is unimportant as long as we have the concepts. Jesus actually walked on earth, died on the cross, and raised from the dead. It is a historical fact not just concepts. As an independent spoke on historicity.
3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
God's essential goodness, love, eternity, immutability	Natural theology – God revealed through nature	Sin nature, human history and consequences of sin and corruption
Trinity – each person	Common grace – good things we experience because of what God created	People are prone to minimize their sin nature – they don't see the depth

Actions of God in history and his interactions with humanity	Inherent desire we have as people for something better – goodness of creation	
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Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	Center - Bible
Cross, substitution atonement, grace, mercy and God's justice	Purpose of man, heaven, Christian community and ecclesiology. God making right what man made wrong. Reforms how we look at each other; instead of one-upping we can forgive one another. Approach from a fruit of the spirit.	Inerrancy, inspiration, authority, profitability (all God-breathed)
	Piper - Christian hedonism – put away a lesser good for a better good.	

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community. What does audience already believe about this.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
3 key demographics in Dearborn – Arab Muslims, White range of low to middle class, young professionals (millennials)	Young professional – world / life is good, unfallen creation; treated each other well, then we experience the good creation.	Both groups land similarly. Depth of personal sin not felt. Things aren't right, so social justice is making things right. They like to feel / think they are caring about people.
God is a good guy	Challenging historical accounts of creation. Evolution.	
God is love – they agree, but when define what love is, then feel pushback; need	Middle class young to retired – have some of biblical back story; don't have same issues of	

to redefine in people's minds	historicity - more likely to accept the historical. Don't see how relevant to their lives.	
Jesus - those who don't know Jesus to those who do know Jesus; gospel fluency		
Q – what spokes would culture add to the tire		

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 – Restoration	
Failure to see depth of sin, so let's do good, social justice, that's our redemption story.	All get along and be happy together - their preferred future	
Middle class – let's manage behavior and teach rules and get us right.	Middle class – be comfortable	

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.
- Jeff Vanderstelt – root to fruit – what do I do; goes for individual person not culture; what do I do, what does that say that I am, what does that say I believe about God, what is the false view of God then work it backwards.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
MC – we born, we live and we die here; we keep our family and community tight – goal is that in itself, happiness and fulfillment	We assume the authority of the Bible; Shared experience stories – high school and college – come of age experiences	Learn more about cars in the land of Ford Motor Co, many people are engineers; drop name nice cars
	Henry Ford and Ford Motor company – shared story in the community	
YP – finding purpose; why do I exist, if I do x, do I ruin my purpose?		

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	
Cars	YP – share stories of people who have found purpose where it was to be found	

Sports		
Dearborn – homecoming	Identify the irrationality of some of the purposes people propose.	

6. Preaching in Woodside’s multisite model.
 - a. Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - Serves a degree – explain, illustrate and apply – it’s mostly in illustration and application. Try not to use Greek word unless it has specific value. Thinking through illustrations and stories considering the congregation.
 - b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside’s model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - Limits addressed when CPs can do one-off sermons.
 - c. Does Woodside’s model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - Stayed within the lanes but moved toward the boundaries.
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - More one-off sermons.
 - Great freedom within lane – hold to big idea, points and text.
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
 - Multi religious context – do not think religious as a subset of culture but as separate.

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR JEFF KEITH

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - Imagery is spot on.
2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you’ve identified.
 - Bible as the source, maybe at the center.
 - God reveals his plan of redemption before foundations of world, but now shows in all the ways.
3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 – Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
Worship – demands worship worthy of all praise, center of all life and is the meaning and purpose of all life	Man is created being to worship and all things were created to worship.	Man was distinct from creation – nothing else gets a choice to worship, but man is given the choice to worship, but we rebel against worship. This is original sin.
	Chief end of man is to glorify God by worshiping him.	

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	Center - Bible
Story of redemption from creation to Christ; way God slowly unveiled his plan about Christ; he did not reveal it all to Moses but it has always been the plan. The law was not sufficient but it always pointed to Christ.	Sanctification – redeemed in a moment; an already and not yet of restoration. We enter into holiness and becoming more like Christ and we go on this process until Christ returns.	There has to be a source of truth. We get our understanding of truth, so there always is a source. The Bible is the best way. Contrast that wheel given to a Muslim who would put a different source like the Koran.

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 – Fall
Is God good?	How did we get here – evolution?	Our good works. Cosmic scale of good outweighing bad. Is good apart from them or part of them. It is hard for a person to say that I’m evil. Killing is bad but lying is not so bad.
Is God personal?	Are we here by accident? Is there order to the apparent chaos in the world?	

Deism – did God create and leave us on our own?		
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Spoke 4 -Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	Center - Bible
Good person.	Self help – behavior modification; will myself to do this. I can be better. Us changing us rather than God driven.	One of many paths of truths. Sits on the same level as Dianetics. There are threads of truth in everything.
Saved because my parents went to church. (Catholic)	God is going to be gracious in the end, everyone will make it; multiple roads to heaven.	

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.
- Do not see a difference between cultural narrative and shared story.
 - Separate and identify limits and offer possibilities – cultural narrative and shared story similar

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative/Limits	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
A good family is of supreme worth; kids growing up going to college is successful. Commands of Christ and limits in own life as incompatible. I can't do anything without money; there is no hope, no way to live when cannot meet needs.	General assumption in preaching – Bible is authority and Word of God. When sermon allows to justify it, he takes it. When preaching a miracle, the Bible is accurate.	Using Lexus commercial with a box doesn't work for lower economic people groups.
	When things are broken, begin with brokenness. This is not the way it was designed. Pain and heartache.	Dialect and vernacular; use simple language vs educated language. Use words easily understood.

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Possibilities	
Lions, Tiger sports teams.	Limit – definer of what success is; a successful parent but where does that end? Are you fully satisfied even though you went to	

	college? If kid works at fast food, does that mean you're a failure.	
Where we find our pride – Detroit Auto show.	Find ultimate peace. If successful and they go off to work and never see you, is that really successful?	

6. Preaching in Woodside's multisite model.
 - a. Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - Determine how monocultural vs differences. I must preach toward the middle in the various groups.
 - Must know who you are talking to. Would preach differently at different campuses – language different or quotes from different scholars.
 - b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - Phrasing of the big idea and points. It could be simpler. Is it straight forward.
 - It depends on how closely they are held to be tied to the notes.
 - c. Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - There is lots of freedom. Pontiac is preaching in a far different context.
 - It's helpful allowing different personality.
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - If each campus could develop – this is an attendee: hopes, fears, worries. What does the average member of Warren look like?
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
 - 5 spokes – need to be careful in contextualization that our message doesn't fall on one of the spokes. Must evaluate over the year and see where messages are landing: too much focus on redemption may lead to easy believism. Today we are talking heavily about being a follower of Christ - if we just focus on being a follower, then it could be individualized not a community commitment, so no need for the church. Follower emphasis but no focus on evangelism.

INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR TIM HOLDRIDGE

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - Tire illustration does connect. Helps people who don't understand all the theology, gives good visible understanding of what contextualization looks like. Helps theologically driven people come toward application and be flexible. People who are all about application need to come back to the rim to see the foundation of Scriptures.

2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - Good basis points for message. These are helpful handlebars for new believers and go into a flow.
3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
He is holy without sin. Sin is not ok with God. It is not that God hates you but he hates sin. Pastors in Detroit known to teach that God hates sinners.		
God as father; he wants a relationship with us as his sons and daughters; brings God close to us to understand.		
Jesus bridges gap between holy God to become personable and knowable to us. Walking the earth with us, knowing our weaknesses; taking sin on himself. He knows what we walk through. He makes holy God knowable to and understandable for us.		
Spirit – we can partake in who God is because we have him with us. He leads us into all truth. This is how God is always with us.		

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 – Restoration	

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he

noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 - God	Spoke 2 -	Spoke 3 - Fall
People have a sense of God in Detroit; they know there is a God. They often have more honor and reverence for God -more than suburban people. They have a high view of pastors and influence. The reverence of God has kept God away from them so they can live like the devil while he is apart from them.		They know there is evil and Satan in the world. Need to help them take responsibility for their own sin rather than point and blame sin. I did not have any choice; it was forced upon me.
He is powerful and knows what’s going on.		
They have a spiritual awareness.		

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 -	
Embrace the power that is within you. Humanistic – you have the power to change your destiny; it is all within you. Once you find it, it all changes.		
I was bad, but now I’ve gotten better.		

- The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
What are the lies people are believing; if you don’t know the lies, you can’t speak truth to it.	Mayor of Detroit had hunger for power and money. Discuss what has happened in the city.	Find a statement – must understand how culture communicates – money means power. Stuff is power. Power is not really when you have hands on it

	<p>Studying riots of 1967 as this is the 50th year anniversary.</p> <p>Election – city was devastated because they saw Trump as racist.</p>	<p>but when you give it away. So, you don't need to be slave to it. Beat our money into submission. Lingo – “beat you down”.</p>
I made this money, so it is mine.		Cannot say “cotton pickin” in a frustration way

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	

6. Preaching in Woodside's multisite model.
 - a. Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - A message is like a baby you are nurturing through life, Word, your context. This living organism is the message – how God wants you to share a truth.
 - Taking different experiences you've had, trying to see the two pieces of truth and culture come together.
 - Do not want to be a poser - trying to be something that you are not.
 - b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - Like our process at Woodside in preparing the sermon notes. He is able to take it and modify it. Pushes him to grow more.
 - The big idea is a challenge. It's tough to find one phrase that fits in all cultures.
 - The Woodside model needs to hone the big idea and points. Sometimes it would be better to have points that resonate with people to lead them to action; the action doesn't always need to be in the point.
 - c. Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - Best solution – writers of the sermons may not be the persons who do the big idea; more marketing people help finalize the big idea; let's this group work on the homiletical idea.
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
 - This is all good, likes these discussions. Many think we need to always go deeper into theology. But, we also need to be practical, application-oriented. We need to work on “marketability.” We try to cover up with “we are about the truth of the Bible.” Paul wanted to understand the world in which he lived and shared with the audience. This is exactly what we need as leaders. We need to wrestle with this topic. It is too easy to go back to the Bible only rather than think about the world that is drastically changing.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JON MORALES

1. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of the tire illustration where the rim represents the firm, inflexible, uncompromising while the rubber tire represents the ability to contour to different roads?
 - I like the illustration. I think it does the job well of capturing the gospel and our application of the gospel (rim/rubber).
 - We need both the rim and rubber to get somewhere.
 - Universalistic view of truth is not real; everything we do is contextualized.

2. What do you believe are the primary and uncompromising spokes of the Scripture/Gospel? In the presentation, we discussed 5 spoke areas including: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. Under #3, please write in your spoke areas in the grey area. Feel free to add or remove to adjust to the spoke areas you've identified.
 - Within an evangelical, biblical theology, these are the components we use; in other circles they would choose different areas.

3. Cultural adaptation begins with knowing ourselves. This part of the contextualization filter is identifying the lane of our biblical understanding. Inside each of those primary spokes would be a number of scriptural topic areas. Under each spoke, please identify one or more topic areas that you might preach on to develop the spoke area.

Spoke 1 – God	Spoke 2 – Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
Attributes of God	Material on earth and the heavenly realms.	Humanism: Intrinsic goodness of mankind polluted by society
Determine it by the text		Evil in “the other”
Holiness, wrath, love		Fatalism
We may have our categories that we are most comfortable with, but we should let the passage direct us. Let the book of the Bible and let the scripture determine.		Nihilism

Spoke 4 – Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	

4. The second part of the contextualization filter is understanding the new culture in light of the uncompromising message of the Scriptures. Turning our attention to cultural adaptation, we use the same filter of 5 spokes and examine culture through the spokes. For example, when the apostle Paul evaluated a culture through the spoke of “God”, he noted polytheism in Lystra and Athens as well as monotheism in Antioch. Another example Paul noted when filtering through the spoke of “Creation” was how the

Athenian philosophers believed in the eternality of matter and how Lystra should connect rain and crops to the Creator. Using your spokes from question 3, identify several key cultural topics for your campus community.

Spoke 1 – God	Spoke 2 - Creation	Spoke 3 - Fall
Atheism – most common in RO culture	Creation is evil – in fundamental churches, world is evil so we should not mix with it and can't wait to get out of it.	Humanism: Intrinsic goodness of mankind polluted by society – prevalent thought in our culture that we are good intrinsically; polluted by outside influences.
Materialism/naturalism	Creation is everything – eastern view of no creator and creature distinction	Evil in “the other” – polarization of views where it's easier to see defects in other than self-awareness.
God as impersonal force		Fatalism – what will be will be; accept life, accept ourselves, not much will change
		Nihilism – hopeless, destructive self and the world; suicidal attempts; meaninglessness

Spoke 4 - Redemption	Spoke 5 - Restoration	
Self-salvation	Death as the end	
Works-salvation	The world as evil	
No salvation (required)	Heaven as the ultimate destination (not the new earth)	

5. The third part of the contextualization filter is identifying the cultural topic areas that flesh out the 5 cultural keys: Cultural Narrative, Shared Story, Language, Illustration, and Identifying Limits/Offering Possibilities. Using the 5 cultural keys, please identify the cultural topic areas that you see in your campus community.

Spoke 1 – Cultural Narrative	Spoke 2 – Shared Story	Spoke 3 - Language
Inevitable progress of society – American narrative, moving forward, make it great again, bring change; better days are yet ahead. Contrast that with the East who thinks cyclically, not moving toward a grand end, but we	Financial success is an ultimate good; career-driven group	Categories that make sense to the audience (similar to those under illustrations)

are here and be faithful to the role or caste system; not trying to move up the ladder.		
Evolutionary understanding of mankind	Romantic love is an ultimate good	
Beliefs in justice that are unwarranted – race/gender equality and justice valued but not warranted without God; no authority to say all are created equally; Christians believe it because Scripture says it.		

Spoke 4 - Illustrations	Spoke 5 – Limits/Possibilities	
Husband-wife/ parent-child	Life on earth cannot explain humanity exhaustively; why does evil succeed, this is all there is, fear death because death takes away relationships, all achievements, and wealth; why be so driven if it can all be taken away in a moment - but here's how the gospel answers that: death does not take it all away; those with God, love continues in the eternal; the meaning and knowledge is fuller in heaven; stores up riches in heaven.	
Business world	Human rights has no legitimate basis	
Sports world	Love and meaning are universal experiences but without sufficient basis (on a materialist model)	
Literature and movies		
Bible stories		

6. Preaching in Woodside's multisite model.

- a. Describe what role contextualization has in your weekly preaching.
 - Everything we do is contextualization of the gospel. Every discussion, speech, sermon is contextualized.
 - All interpretation of the word of God is contextualization.

- b. Describe the limits to contextualized preaching in Woodside's model compared to a one-campus church model in your same area.
 - I don't see many limits. The entire word of God is application to all contexts and cultures. So it doesn't matter where we're preaching from, that text will be relevant to any culture.
 - Perhaps if Woodside shied away from certain passages, this could present a problem over time.
 - If a congregation is going through a very specific season, the multi-site approach might represent a challenge (e.g. the pastor is not able to choose what he thinks his congregation needs), but I don't really think, even then, this would be an issue.
 - c. Does Woodside's model allow for more freedom to contextualize than you have tried so far?
 - Probably.
 - d. What recommendations would you suggest to increase contextualization?
 - I think contextualization increases the more the interpreter knows (1) The word of God (and therefore God and himself) and (2) His city and culture. The deeper we go into God's word to know him and be known and the deeper we go into knowing our neighbor (and businesses and institutions in our community, etc.), the more appropriate our ministries will be for our context.
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts?
- Preachers must allow the text to determine the contours for contextualization.
 - All scripture speaks to all cultures, so it doesn't matter much what scripture is chosen.
 - The notes will be culturally nuanced - some softer and some louder.
 - There would be no room for topical discussion.
 - With minimal requirements – big idea and points – leaves a wide lane to reach their culture. Do we allow the preacher to interact with the Word and make it their own. When it feels more like Starbucks then we may have a problem; Woodside doesn't feel like a cookie cutter.

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